ALL-STORY

Combined with MUNSEY

Love Stories *of the* American Girl

On Sale Every Other Wednesday

Feb. 22

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Lured by a Dream

By Maud McCurdy Welch

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"They Snickered When I Got Up To Speak"

—But from the First Word, I Held Them Spellbound

THE banquet hall was crowded. Suddenly I heard the chairman's voice say—"We will now have a few words from Mr. Byron Munn." It came like a flash of lightning! He was unexpectedly calling on *me* for a speech!

As I started to get up, I heard a titter run around the table.

"Watch him make a fool of himself," I overheard some one whisper. "He's so bashful he's afraid of his own voice."

I knew they were expecting me to make myself ridiculous, but I only grinned inside.

I stood squarely on my two feet and started in!

"But When I Commenced to Speak"—

Almost from the first word, the smiles of doubt and derision faded from their faces. They were incredulous—amazed! Instantly the atmosphere became so tense that you could have heard a pin drop! No snickers nor sneers *now!* My voice, clear as a bell—strong, forceful, unfaltering—rang out through the banquet hall as I hammered home each point of my message with telling strokes! I let myself go—soaring to a smashing finale that almost brought them to their feet!

When I finished, there was an instant of dead silence! And then it came—a deafening wave of applause rolling up from one hundred pairs of hands—spontaneous, excited, thrilling!

What 20 Minutes a Day Will Show You

- How to talk before your club or lodge
- How to address board meetings
- How to propose and respond to toasts
- How to make a political speech
- How to tell entertaining stories
- How to make after-dinner speeches
- How to converse interestingly
- How to write letters
- How to sell more goods
- How to train your memory
- How to enlarge your vocabulary
- How to overcome stage fright
- How to develop self-confidence
- How to acquire a winning personality
- How to be the master of any situation.

Was Once a "Human Clam"

After it was all over, Jack Hartray fell into step beside me as I left the hall. "Gee, that was a great speech!" he said enthusiastically. "You certainly raised yourself about 100% in the eyes of every person in that place tonight. . . . And yet they used to call you 'a human clam'—and the quietest man in the office!"

It was true, too. All my life I *had* been handicapped with a shy, timid and retiring nature. With only a limited education, I never could express my ideas in a coherent, forceful way. As a result I saw dozens of men with less ability pass me by simply because they were good talkers and knew how to create the right impression. It was maddening.

A Lucky Accident

At last I accidentally ran across a little book entitled *How to Work Wonders With Words*. Between its covers I discovered certain facts and secrets I had never dreamed of. Difficulties were swept away as I found a simple way to overcome timidity, stage-fright and self-consciousness—and how to win advancement, popularity and success.

Today I hold the sort of position that I had always envied. My salary has been increased! I am not only in constant demand as a speaker in public but I am asked to more social affairs than I have time to attend. To sum it all up, I am meeting worthwhile people, earning more than I ever dared expect and enjoying life to the fullest possible degree! And furthermore, the *sheer power of convincing speech* has been the big secret of my success!

* * *

The experience of Byron Munn is typical. Not only men who have made millions, but thousands of others have found success after learning the secrets of powerful, effective speech. Being able to say the right thing in the right way at the right time has perhaps been responsible for more brilliant success than any other one thing under the sun!

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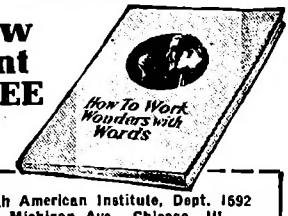

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Always the dream was the same—a garish café, a girl singing, a brutish man watching her with sullen eyes

Lured by a Dream

A midnight vision led her into a deadly trap, and forced into her lover's arms a bride whose memory was gone, whose life lay in ruins—

By Maud McCurdy Welch

Author of "Deserted"

PAULA LANGTRY awakened with a shudder. A perplexed frown marred the satin smoothness of her forehead, and her eyes wore a troubled expression.

That dream—that strange, uncanny dream! It had come for the third time. So vivid it had been, she had only to shut her eyes to see it all once more. Always it was the same. The garish interior of a cheap café, where the lights burned dimly. The odor of stale

food—a motley crowd of people—a girl singing—while near by a brutish man watched her with sullen, threatening eyes.

Although the girl seemed slighter of figure, and there were dark shadows under her eyes, Paula recognized her as herself.

Yet never in all her carefree, luxurious life had she seen such a figure as this brutish scowling man, nor such a place as this garish café, nor had she ever worn such a shabby dress as that the singer wore.

She looked about the dainty appointments of her room with questioning eyes. What could the dream mean? Had not her life always been beautifully and exquisitely ordered? Were there not countless friends and all the good things of life in abundance? Dear, good old Dobbin to mother and scold her?

And, best of all—David?

At the thought of him a dreamy smile played about her lips. She adored David. She always had, and she knew she always would. He was so different from all the other men she had known. So tall, so stalwart, with such grave brown eyes and such a frank, endearing smile. There was nobody in the world like him. So infinitely dear, so chivalrous—

If David ever proposed, she knew what her answer would be. She had been waiting and hoping so long. There were times when she was almost sure he loved her. There were other times when doubt would come and make her a prey to the awful tortures of jealousy. She knew deep in her heart that

nothing else in the world mattered, if only David cared.

Sometimes she was tempted to tell him of the dream that had come so often to haunt her sleeping hours. Of how she saw herself a little homeless waif, bereft of her lovely furs and silken gowns, compelled to sing in order to earn her bread and butter. Of the menace that lay in the brutish man's eyes.

Would he understand?

FOR a long while Paula sat toying with the dainty breakfast which Dobbin had brought her, her thoughts busy. The place she had seen so often in her dreams—the cheap café — was there such a place? If so, it could only be down in the Quarter—the only place in the world where she might expect to find it. The more she thought of it, the more the idea grew.

She would go down there and look for it. And if she should find it—the mystery of her dream might be solved.

There was something about Paula Langtry, irrespective of her exquisite blond beauty, that set her quite apart from other girls. A sort of valiant, boy-like grace, a gay and courageous spirit of adventure.

Having once made up her mind, she lost no time in making her plans. But first she must see David. She had half made up her mind to confide in him. And yet—she was not sure.

She found him sitting moodily in his office, but a quick smile rose to his lean, narrow face as he recognized her.

Paula perched herself on the glass-topped table and regarded him with serious eyes. "Buried in your musty old law books as usual, David."

"I suppose it *is* old-fashioned for anybody to work these days," he smiled.

Paula suddenly seated herself decorously in a chair. For a moment she sat toying with the fasteners of her gloves. No use to tell David. She couldn't expect him to understand. She would find out for herself if the dream meant anything.

David regarded her quizzically. "You've been up to something. Shall I have to go to police headquarters and pay another fine for speeding?"

She shook her head.

"Not this time. But I'm going away —on a little adventure. And so I've come to say good-by."

David frowned. "Sounds frightfully reckless to me."

"It is—rather. You've always reminded me that I should make a will. Well, if anything should happen—that is, if I shouldn't come back, everything I possess is to go to the little orphans in the Interstate Orphanage. You see, I have not forgotten when I too wore a gingham apron just like a hundred others, and got up each morning to the sound of a gong, and went to bed the same way. You know my father adopted me when I was four, but he was so good to me that I never knew the difference from a real parent."

David nodded.

"Yes, he was too generous for your own good. You're terribly spoiled, Paula."

"Perhaps," she admitted with a little shrug. Then she leaned toward him. "So good-by for a little time, David." There was a wistful note in her voice. She was wishing he would kiss her just once. He never had.

But David's gray eyes were stern. "Paula, you are being rather absurd, you know. The idea of going off adventuring, as you call it, is foolhardy. It might even prove to be dangerous."

"Don't be preachy," she flashed.

"Remember you're only my lawyer, not my husband."

David sighed. "I'm not sure but that I wish I were."

The girl laughed lightly. "You'd soon make me over into an old-fashioned type, wouldn't you? A girl with dresses to her ankles, who'd coquette over a fan and swoon at a mouse." She made a little moué. "Oh, David, why must you dislike the modern girl so?"

"Because most of them are reckless and irreverent. For instance, your own disastrous idea of going off somewhere alone. But will you listen to me? Oh, no, you only laugh it off, and proceed on your own sweet way."

"Prune!" she flung at him laughingly. Then her face became serious. "I'm going, David, because I must. I'm going in—in search of a place I've seen in my dreams. It haunts me. I've got to find it if I can."

David made an eager move toward her. "You've been seeing too many wild movies. You're letting your imagination run away with you. Paula, I beg of you, do be sensible." He tried to take her hand, but she eluded him.

"Good-by, David, remember the orphans."

Then she was gone. A faint fragrance remained in the air, a poignant reminder of her colorful personality.

IT was late the next afternoon that Mrs. Elliott called David at his apartment. David had always liked the sweet-faced gentlewoman who had presided over Judge Langtry's home for years preceding his death, and who had always stood in place of a mother to Paula.

In answer to her request, he drove over to the Langtry home on Carondelet Street. He could tell by her expression that Mrs. Elliott was worried.

"Paula took her roadster; said she was going to spend the night somewhere down in the Quarter. She even hinted that she might cross the Louisiana line and go on down into Mexico. I could do nothing to stop her. I hoped she'd reconsider and come back, but it seems to have been in vain. The worst of it is, she went alone."

David listened gravely. Reckless, foolish Paula! Why hadn't he stopped her?

"If you would only go after her, and bring her back?" Mrs. Elliott suggested hopefully. "You've always had more influence with her than anybody else."

"I shall do my best," he promised, and immediately rose.

The rest of the evening he devoted to driving up and down the rude cobbled streets of the Quarter, straining his eyes in every direction. But there was no trace of Paula, nor of the little maroon-colored sport roadster. She always drove with such reckless headlong speed.

Had she really crossed the State line and headed toward Mexico? The next day he continued his search more anxiously than ever. Awful forebodings of what might have happened came over him. He even went so far as to give a minute description of the car to police authorities, with the hope of discovering just where she had gone.

For three days David lived in a fever, his nerves jangled and on edge, through anxiety and sleepless nights. Never once did he relax his vigilance, his search carrying him into all the little alleyways and dirty side streets of the Quarter.

Then one day, just as it seemed he was ready to give way to despair, he found parked close to the curb in front of a dingy café, a maroon-colored road-

ster on which there were the reassuring initials P. L.!

He gave an exclamation of joy. Then Paula was in the neighborhood, somewhere. It wouldn't be long now before he would find her. Darling, reckless, lovable Paula! He wondered if she had ever guessed how much he loved her!

Sounds of music came from the inside of the café. A girl's voice singing floated out the open windows, and suddenly ceased on a shrill high note. And just at that moment a slight figure rushed out the door, stumbled quickly past him, and ran blindly into the street just as an automobile swerved round the corner.

There was the sound of a sickening impact — a muffled cry — the mad screeching of brakes.

It was the work of an instant for David to reach the prostrate little figure lying on the pavement. Gently he brushed back the tumbled mass of fair short curls, and found himself looking into the exquisite, marble-like face of a girl who, though much thinner and more shabbily dressed, he recognized as Paula Langtry.

LESS than an hour later David carried the slight unconscious form up the stairs of the big house on Carondelet Street. A doctor was summoned, and he and Mrs. Elliott waited anxiously for the verdict.

David's fears ran apace. Was she dying? Would she never again open her glorious blue eyes?

And he knew full well that if she were indeed dying, life for him would also be over.

At last came Dr. Grant's reassuring words: "There's no internal injury. A nasty scalp wound, but no concussion."

As if in confirmation of the doctor's words, the girl's eyes slowly opened.

David dropped on one knee beside the silk-covered bed. Her blue eyes met his bewilderingly, with no light of recognition. "Where am I?" her voice came weakly.

"At home, dear," he answered her gently.

Her eyes traveled unhappily around the luxurious room. The velvet hangings, the soft Chinese rug, the exquisite taffeta-draped dressing table, which a queen might have envied, the lovely rose-tile bathroom just beyond.

"I've never been here before! This is not my home. I must go back."

She tried to rise, but David held out a restraining arm.

Mrs. Elliott's eyes were filled with tears. Dr. Grant took David's place by the bedside. "Paula, dear, you have had a blow on your head that has —temporarily made things confusing. But you are home at last, with those who love you. In time things will seem right again."

She gazed at him in pained perplexity. "You mean to be kind, I know, but this is not my home. You must let me go back—where—where I came from."

Dr. Grant made another attempt to reassure her. "Where else should you be, child, but in your own home? Where is it that you would go?"

She gazed at him through tear filled eyes, as the sudden truth rushed over her like a flood. "Oh, I don't know—I don't know."

It became clear at last that although Paula had returned, she was not the same girl who had gone so recklessly away. Dr. Grant's verdict was that she was suffering from a form of amnesia, and he gave instructions that she must live very quietly.

"How long will—will such a condition last?" David asked sorrowfully.

The doctor shook his head. "I cannot tell. Sometimes a few weeks — sometimes—years. The change when it comes is often unexpected—quite sudden—like switching on a light."

David was crushed. The girl he loved had returned at last, but she was no more the gay, imperious creature of old, whose butterfly existence he had often deplored. In her stead there was a pale-faced girl with shadow-haunted eyes, whose mind and memory were struggling under a cloud.

What had frightened her so when she came running from the dingy little café, and stumbled into the very path of an approaching car? Why was she wearing a faded cotton dress— Paula, who loved beautiful things so—who had known nothing but the touch of silk against her soft flesh—Paula, who had been fastidious almost to a fault?

The questions dinned and throbbed over and over in his brain, but to none of them could he find a satisfactory answer.

AS the days went by, David found there were many things about this girl that were contrary to the Paula who had been. She was only a pale little ghost of her former self. He had believed that he wanted her to be different, to be less pleasure-loving, but he missed the old fervor, the old verve and dash.

One of the most noticeable changes was in the matter of her clothes. Where once she had been given to exotic, almost barbaric colors, and bizarre jewels, she now chose very simple frocks, and seemed but little interested in clothes.

Mrs. Elliott was even more sorely perplexed. The morning after the girl's return, she had gone to her room as usual with a tempting breakfast tray. "I hope you are better, Paula, dear," she said gently.

The girl sat up in bed, her fair hair tousled from sleep, her blue eyes wistfully questioning. "What name did you call me?"

"Why, by your own name, dear. Paula. You're Paula Langtry. Don't you remember your father, the good Judge Langtry, who adopted you and gave you his name and everything he possessed?"

Mrs. Elliott's voice sounded near to tears. She had hoped that with the morning the girl's obsession would have passed.

"A pretty name—but I'm sure it isn't—isn't mine," the girl said thoughtfully. Then her voice came very low. "And who—what is your name?"

Mrs. Elliott gave a violent start.

"I'm Sophy Elliott, dear. You've always called me Dobbin. A name left over from your baby days when we used to play horse together." Her voice was sorrowful.

For a long while the girl sat in deep thought, the dainty breakfast tray untouched, her mind struggling under the clouds that seemed to have enveloped her.

Mrs. Elliott had a sudden inspiration. She went into an adjoining room, and returned with a photograph in a beautiful silver frame. "Surely you'll recognize this?"

The photograph was of a laughing-eyed, fair-haired girl, with lovely delicate features, a rosebud mouth, displaying two dazzling rows of small, very white teeth, and a pair of very clear, gloriously blue eyes.

"Why it—it's me!" she exclaimed in a voice that held a relieved gladness.

"Of course, my lamb. Whom else could it be?" Mrs. Elliott answered in quick relief.

But though she was somewhat reassured, the days that followed brought little hope that Paula would soon be her old radiant, fun-loving self. She was always quiet and thoughtful. When

"Let me go!" she panted. "You beast! Let me go!"

any member of "the gang" called up, of which she had always been the ringleader, she begged Dobbin to refuse their pressing invitations. This was so unlike the Paula who had been that Dobbin always went quickly away to hide the tears in her eyes.

PERHAPS the greatest shock David received was on the afternoon when he called to take her for a drive. Paula had always insisted upon taking the wheel during their jaunts together. So he apologized when he took his seat saying that until she was stronger, Dr. Grant thought it better for her not to handle a car. To which she had replied surprisingly "that she had never learned to drive a car."

David was aghast. Not know how to drive—Paula!

A vision of her came before him, sitting at the wheel of her smart, long-slung roadster, tearing like mad through the city streets, her hair blown back from her temples, her eyes two dancing sprites of mischief. And yet she sat here calmly and said she had never learned to drive!

Was there no memory left whatever of the gay and irresponsible Paula that once had been?

Strange too that she never seemed to mind the absence of her gay friends. It was difficult to realize that this pale-faced girl was the same who had remained out until all hours of the morning, dancing and whiling away the hours, the very merriest of her crowd. But he was glad that she did not seem to want her old friends. For the first time she seemed to rely on his companionship alone. For the first time

in all her hectic life, Paula seemed content, even anxious, to spend the long evenings at home.

One evening, David, who loved music passionately, seated himself at the little rosewood grand in the music room, his fingers idly playing the music of a very old ballad. He was startled to hear her voice rising shyly in the words—a voice of singular clearness and beauty. He grasped her hands impulsively.

"Paula, how have you kept such a talent hidden? I've never heard you sing like that before."

An unhappy light leaped into her eyes. "But always—*always* I've wanted to sing. My ambition has always been to be a concert singer. Don't—don't you remember?"

David was shaken to the very core of his being. Heretofore he had often heard Paula sing the light jazz and love ditties of the day in an untrained, slightly throaty voice—and suddenly she sang with the divine sweetness of an angel! A change indeed.

The troubled look remained on her face. "Do you not remember that I—I have always studied — and have wanted to sing?"

It was as if her mind were groping, trying to seize upon some tangible truth that was purposely eluding her.

But it was difficult for David to associate any musical ambitions with Paula, the merry-hearted, the irresponsible. Ambitions were serious things. He forced himself to answer her soothingly. "Of course, dear, I remember now. For a moment it seemed to have escaped me."

Several times she had rather timidly asked him to take her back to the part of the Quarter where he had found her. But David had gently refused. He did not think it advisable. Until Paula was less confused — until she seemed stronger, he believed it to be unwise.

THE time came when he wished he had yielded. For late one evening, when Paula was sitting alone in the living room trying to read, the door opened, and a tall young man came in laughingly and grasped both her hands. "Look here, Paula, what's all this about your being ill and having to live the simple life? What you need is just another dose of good times, so you're going stepping out with me this very night. We've missed you like nobody's business. Any party's a fizzle for me—as long as you're absent."

She gazed at him unhappily. Just that moment Dobbin came in. She shook hands with him, and glanced anxiously at Paula.

"Paula's always glad to see her friends at home, Robin, but she really isn't up to running around like she used to. Please don't urge her."

Robin Montgomery laughed easily.

"Oh, come now, be a sport! What Paula really needs is some fun. No wonder she's ill staying here bottled up all the time. We're going down and barging in on a dance in the slums —not far from the Quarter. It 'll be perfectly safe, and a gorgeous time will be had by all. Paula, you'll go, won't you? I promised the others I'd bring you."

Her eyes were suddenly lighted by a look of excitement. "Down in the Quarter?"

He nodded. "Yes, at Nuvolini's. Are you on?"

She nodded, her face flushing with sudden anticipation.

"Attagirl!"

When David came by after working rather late at his office, he found Mrs. Elliott full of uneasiness.

"This is the first time she's shown any interest at all in her old friends, and I'm sure it was only because they were going to the Quarter—Nuvolini's, I think he called it."

David knew the place and its none too savory reputation. He decided to go after her at once, and at least to remain near her in case she should need his help.

He found her looking radiantly lovely in a low-cut, gracefully floating gown of black mousseline de soie. Looking more like the Paula of old than she had for weeks and weeks. But there was a strained, almost tragic expression in her eyes as she danced with Robin Montgomery, who was holding her much closer than David thought necessary.

After the dance was finished, he went up to her and took her arm. "I've come to take you home, Paula," he said in a low voice.

Robin did not hear, and excused himself to go in search of another partner.

She looked up at David with a little smile of relief. "I'm glad. I don't seem to—belong here. I shall be glad to be home again."

David went in search of her wrap. She moved slightly toward the entrance, unconscious that a brutish-looking man was following her with angry, red-lidded eyes.

Before she realized what had happened he had her by the arm and had drawn her quickly outside.

"I've found you again, you little idiot. You won't have a chance to run away again. Come on now—no foolishness." He held her arm in a tight grip and tried to pull her toward a small maroon-colored roadster which was parked close to the curb. She struggled furiously to break his grasp on her arm, but his fingers were like wire rope.

"Let me go! You beast! Let me go!"

He held her all the more tightly.

"Better come peaceful now. I've got you and I'll keep you. A man's got a right to his own daughter."

HER face had turned the ashy pallor of death. A scream of terror came from her lips. At that moment a powerful swinging blow caught the man under the chin, sending him reeling groggily to the ground, while over him stood David, his dark eyes blazing, his arm brandished menacingly.

Paula closed her eyes as a sickening sensation swept over her. When she again opened them, David's arms were about her, his fingers softly brushing back her hair.

"Has he gone?" she asked weakly.

"Yes. He took himself off in a hurry. I—should have killed him."

She shuddered. "He said he was my father. But, oh, David, he can't be! He can't be!"

His arm tightened about her protectively. "Nothing in the world could be more impossible. The man is undoubtedly drunk."

But there was a baffled look in David's eyes, which Paula could not see. He was thinking of the car. Paula's maroon-colored roadster with the initials P. L., against which he had found her leaning when he had knocked out the brute who had attacked her. Under the dazzling light of the electric sign at the entrance of Nuvolini's, he had recognized the car at once. Only a few weeks before he had seen it parked outside a dingy little café, but under the stress and excitement of Paula's accident he had

neglected to send for it. When he had done so, it was gone.

Now that he had found it again he would take no chances on getting it home. Beckoning a bluecoat who stood half a block away, he explained the situation and made arrangements for it to be taken back to the Langtry garage.

When he and Paula were once more safely at home, the question rose to his lips which he had kept valiantly silent for so long.

"Paula, I want you to marry me. To give me the right to protect you always. I want to help you chase away the dark clouds from your mind, and find your real self again."

But even as he spoke so confidently, he was filled with misgivings. Would she ever be the same again, or would she always be as she was to-day, quiet, restrained? Like a lovely alabaster lamp whose flame had been extinguished forever.

Her eyes filled with tears.

"You are my one good, kind friend. I respect and admire you more than any man I ever knew. But I—do not love you." She placed her hand gently on his. "David, it's hard to tell you this. I do not know, but I—I feel there is another. Somewhere there is some one I love. I feel constantly drawn by some force I cannot resist—down to the Quarter. I do not understand it. I can only feel that down there I shall find love—a love that has become lost."

David's face blanched. He raised her hand silently to his lips.

At last his voice came brokenly. "Then we shall always be the very best of friends. I shall ask nothing else."

Dear little girl with the darkened mind and the shadow-haunted eyes! It could only be his right to be near, to protect her with his life, if need be. He must only take that which she offered, and hope for nothing more.

"BUT, darling, you have loved David all your life!" It was the voice of Dobbin, gently expostulating. "There is no one like him. No one so steady, so grave and gentle. So much a real man. Had your father lived it would have been his dearest wish. The families have been steadfast friends for generations. Now that Dr. Grant says you must have a sea voyage and at least six months in Italy in order to regain your strength, I'm thinking what an ideal honeymoon trip that would be for you and David. Such a trip is beyond my strength, and I'd like to know that David had the right to take care of you always."

"David is a dear. He deserves the best in the world—so much more than I can give him," the girl said regretfully.

But Dobbin continued her plea.

"It's only because ever since your accident you've been mentally confused. Once you are David's wife, you will see things in their right perspective. I know full well that David has always been the only man in the world for you. I have sometimes thought it was because of him that you have flirted a little recklessly and played with a rather affected gayety. You were only marking time—waiting for him to propose. And now that he has— Oh, Paula, my dear, how can I stand by and let you ruin your own life?"

When Dr. Grant also made his plea that Paula should marry David, it was no small wonder that the girl gave in at last. In her weakened state, she

was not proof against so much persuasion.

When David called that night she shyly laid her hand in his and looked into his eyes.

"David, I'm afraid of the future. I'm even afraid of life, it seems. If you still want me, I shall consider it a great honor to be your wife."

He kissed her hand very gently. "I promise you, you shall not be sorry, my dear. My greatest joy and privilege shall be in helping you to find happiness."

Mrs. Elliott and the good Dr. Grant were overjoyed at the girl's final decision. With David as her husband, her future would be safeguarded. Plans were begun for the wedding.

In spite of the doubts and fears that beset her at every turn, Paula would not have been human had she not taken pleasure in the lovely trousseau which Mrs. Elliott insisted she must have. But at times it seemed as if her heart lay in her breast, a cold, dead thing. Had she the right to take David's name, his love, and give so little in return?

MEANWHILE on a dingy little side street just off the Quarter, not far from the café where David had found the maroon-colored roadster, a girl was held a prisoner in a small cottage that had been pretty and attractive once, but was now falling into decay.

For days and days she had been kept there by a man with brutish features and scowling eyes. She was not ill-treated. Her meals were brought with regularity by a sullen servant who was both deaf and dumb. But always the door was carefully locked from the outside. And the two windows of the small room were barred.

There seemed to be no hope of escape.

Every day the man with the scowling features came and stood outside the door. "Any time you are ready to marry Pierre La Jorge, Nanette, you shall be free. Until you promise to do as I say, you'll remain a prisoner."

Upon which the girl would exclaim passionately: "But I tell you I am *not* Nanette. I am Paula Langtry, and you shall suffer to the fullest extent of the law for holding me here!"

Whereupon the man would laugh harshly and go away.

And then quite unexpectedly deliverance came.

One afternoon late, a soft voice whispered through the keyhole: "Nanette, I've got the key from old Amos and in a few moments I'll get the door open."

Almost as soon as the voice had spoken the door creaked and opened. A slight girl, with glowing dark eyes and curling black hair stood before her, smiling eagerly.

"Nanette, both Manfred and I have been frightened to death about you. We've waited and waited, and you didn't come. Manfred is almost crazy. We never once dreamed that Rudolph was keeping you a prisoner here. Come, we must get away quickly before he comes back. I bribed old Amos to let me have the key, but he might take a notion to stop us."

Gratefully the girl followed her rescuer out into the light of late afternoon. She breathed in the fresh air with deep gulps of pleasure.

After they were safely away from the house and had covered a distance of several blocks, they walked more slowly and breathed with more ease.

At last the questions that had been so long unasked rose to the girl's lips.

"Why does everybody call me Nanette? Why does that man Rudolph insist that he is my father? Where are we going?"

The dark-eyed girl stopped suddenly, and eyed her companion with consternation. "Nanette, what on earth has happened to you? Has Manfred's trouble unhinged your mind? Everything is quite all right. Manfred was not badly hurt. He will soon be well again. He is waiting for you now. That is where we are going. You are to be married—to-morrow. Don't you remember, dear?"

The girl in the bridal gown fell to the floor, a crumpled little heap of satin and lace

She shook her head.

"No, I don't remember. There's a very good reason for it, you see, for I'm Paula Langtry, and not this girl Nanette. It is all very puzzling, but of one fact I am very sure. Rudolph is not my father, even though he took my purse away from me and my car, and held me a prisoner for so long I've even forgotten just when it was he found me, and I've had no idea who this man is he has been trying to force me to marry."

The other girl gazed at her sorrowfully.

"Rudolph is a gangster. He's trying to make you marry Pierre La Jorge, who is the leader of his gang. He threatened to kill Manfred, because you and he were engaged. But when the police got on his trail he left, and we thought Manfred was safe. A few weeks ago he came back and shot Manfred through a window as he was practicing on his violin. He's been in the hospital until now, and we've waited and waited for you to come."

The girl who was called Nanette shook her head. "It is all very puzzling. You see, I do not know Manfred. And I don't even recognize you. I am sorry because—because—" but her voice ceased.

"I'm Mimi Lacroix, Manfred's sister." The answer came in a slow, pained voice. Then it became passion-

ate, intense. "Oh, you must remember that you are Nanette Gordon! Surely it will all come back to you! What will Manfred say? It will kill him. He has waited for you so anxiously."

For a moment the girl stood hesitant.

"I do not know what to do or say—it is all such a puzzle. But yes—I will go on with you to Manfred. We will see if he, too, thinks I am Nanette. And after that—"

IT was the day set for the wedding. "Happy is the bride the sun shines on!" Mrs. Elliott quoted gayly as she came in with the breakfast tray, and looped back the rich hangings from the windows of the luxurious bedroom.

But in spite of her happy, reassuring voice, it seemed that the girl in the silk-covered bed shivered.

"I still have the feeling that I am a—usurper. That I have no right to marry David. It seems as if my place is far away from here—almost in another world."

Mrs. Elliott put her arms around her. "Darling, forget all your foolish fears and only remember how happy you're going to be as David's wife."

Then the wedding gown was brought in, shimmering satin and real lace. The girl gazed at it white-faced and shaken. In a little while she would wear it. She would go downstairs to the dim, old-fashioned library and listen to the minister pronounce the solemn words that would make her David's wife.

She would bear his name. He would take her away to sunny Italy. He would always be unceasingly kind and tender, but there were times—there would always be times when he would seem only a little less than a stranger.

The hour set for the wedding was almost come. Downstairs she could hear a few guests arriving. Good old Dr. Grant, and his little gray-eyed wife. Two of David's warmest friends. The tall rector with his friendly, interested expression.

Promptly as the hour struck, the girl appeared on the stairway clad in her bridal robe, a lovely, appealing little figure. For a moment she stood at the top of the stairs, hesitated, her step faltering just a little, then she moved daintily, slowly down to where David awaited her.

She felt his arm linked in hers. Caressingly he touched her fingers, which were as cold as ice. Then they walked into the library and stood under the arch of flowers, which Mrs. Elliott's loving hands had fashioned.

The minister moved up to his place, and his solemn voice intoned:

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered together—"

There was the sudden noise of a door being thrown open. A slight figure sprang into the semicircle. A quick, frenzied voice: "David, Dobbin, what *can* this mean? Tell me quickly, is this only another horrible dream?"

The voice was the vibrant voice of the old Paula Langtry who had gone away!

Before them she stood, wearing the somewhat soiled and rumpled clothes she had worn when they had seen her last.

And before her, gazing at her with terrified eyes, stood the little bride-to-be, the pseudo Paula Langtry, clutching the filmy bridal veil between her fingers, her face piteously white.

All eyes were turned upon her questioningly. The real Paula had suddenly returned. Then who could this other girl be, who was her exact coun-

terpart, who for many weeks had been taken for the Paula Langtry who had gone so recklessly away? From where could she have come?

With infinite tact, Dr. Grant grasped the strange situation, and drew the few guests from the room.

SUDDENLY the girl in the bridal garments reached out a hand toward David and fell to the floor, a crumpled little heap of satin and lace.

David lifted her gently and carried her to the divan, followed by Paula, whose glorious blue eyes were full of sympathy. The little bride opened her eyes at last to meet David's anxious dark glance and Paula's sympathetic one.

"You are the girl I've seen so often in my dreams. You must be Nanette Gordon. We are so much alike—that is why people took me for you. Manfred is the only one who believed when I said I was not Nanette."

The girl sat up quickly, a frenzied expression in her eyes. "Manfred? Oh, I—I must go to him at once. He is well—he is not hurt?"

"He is quite out of danger now. But you cannot go to him yet. David shall—shall bring him to you."

A swift smile crossed Nanette's pale face.

"You are so kind. So good. You see, I—remember everything now. Perhaps it was the shock of seeing you that gave me back my memory. Please believe that I did not intentionally take your place. David believed me to be you—so did Mrs. Elliott and Dr. Grant. And I—I could remember nothing clearly."

"I can understand that quite well, since both Mimi and Rudolph believed me to be you. Only Manfred knew—the eyes of love are clearer, it seems."

Paula's voice came very gently, as she took the cold little hand in hers.

David had been silent, his thoughts busy trying to solve the mystery of the sudden turn of events, which had for the moment proved too much even for his legally trained mind.

At last he spoke to the real Paula, as she still sat by the side of the girl she now knew to be Nanette Gordon.

"Give me just an hour, probably less, and I believe I can solve this mystery to the satisfaction of everybody concerned. Also give me Manfred's address."

As soon as Paula wrote it down he went outside, made a quick explanation to the bewildered rector, asking him to wait, and then he summoned a cab.

While he was gone Nanette told her simple story.

When she was five months old, she had been adopted from an orphanage by Mrs. Martha Gordon. They lived alone in the cottage where Paula had been kept a prisoner. Mrs. Gordon believed herself to be a widow. She took in sewing, and they managed to get along quite nicely, until the day when Rudolph Gordon came home after a long absence, and their troubles began.

Rudolph was a big bully of a man, and when Mrs. Gordon died, he immediately began trying to force Nanette to marry a man whom she loathed and threatening the one she loved. However, Rudolph got in trouble and the police were after him, so he left the country, and she and Manfred had believed they were safe. They were planning their marriage when one night, while singing in the café (it was the only means she had of making her living), she saw him leering at her in the crowd of people. She had rushed out to warn Manfred, and had

blindly run in front of a car. David had found her, and she had been brought here.

Paula smiled gently. "It is all very clear now except the startling resemblance between us, and why I should have seen you so often in my dreams."

IT was when David returned less than an hour later that this explanation was forthcoming. With him was Manfred, a tall, dark young man with a kind of spiritual beauty and a classic, Byronic brow.

He took Nanette instantly in his arms. "Carissima, I thought I had lost you! I have been beside myself with anxiety."

Paula and David withdrew, leaving the reunited lovers together.

"I knew," David began happily, "that there couldn't possibly be such a resemblance between two people unless there was some physicai explanation behind it. I found it in the records at the Interstate Orphanage. Here is how it reads:

> "Paula and Nanette Wayne, twins, adm. June 16, 1907. Nanette Wayne adopted by Martha Gordon, November 1, 1907. Paula Wayne adopted by Judge Ernest Langtry August 19, 1911."

Paula's lovely blue eyes lightened. "Then we are sisters!"

"More than that, Paula. You are twins. That explains your dreams. You've made a believer out of me. You see, Nanette was in trouble. Science tells us that there is a peculiar affinity between twins that enables one to receive some kind of psychic warning when the other is in danger."

Paula clasped her hands happily.

"I've always wanted a sister. It's almost too marvelous to be true. Poor little Nanette has had a hard life. I shall make it up to her in every way possible. To begin with, half of everything I possess shall be hers. Manfred is a musician and he shall have every opportunity to develop his talent. I know that is what she would want most—"

"It is like you, Paula, to be so generous," David said with tenderness.

For a moment she was silent. David's voice came again. "But the greatest blessing of all is—that you are still you."

A little shudder shook her body.

"Oh, David, I almost died when I came back and found you about to marry another girl! One who looked like me, and yet was not. I went down in the slums, subconsciously seeking her, as you've explained, though I did not understand it myself, and then I came back to find her in my own house, standing by your side—your bride! It was a terrible shock. You would have married her believing her to be myself. And yet never once have you asked me to be your wife."

"She needed me. You see, if you—you had needed me—the situation would have been different," he explained in a slightly hoarse voice. "But you—had so much—so many, many friends—so much wealth."

"David, has it been your foolish pride that has stood between us all these months?" she demanded passionately.

He did not meet her eyes.

"I'm only a plain man, Paula. One who works for his living. I've loved you always, but—"

She interrupted him with an exclamation.

"And that is all that has been between us, the fact that I've so much more money than I'll ever be able to

spend! Oh, David, darling—" her beautiful face was wreathed with happy smiles.

Then she became serious again.

"I'm so much more worthy to be your wife now, for I'll never again be a social butterfly. I've learned a lot since I've been away—about how the other half of the world live, and what a responsibility it is to have money. Oh, David, shall I have to do the proposing after all?"

He met her eyes with a fond, grave smile. Then suddenly he caught her in his arms.

"*No!* I'm going to do the proposing this very minute! Paula, will you marry me at once—right now? In a few minutes Manfred and Nanette are going to be married. Can we not make it a double wedding? I shall never be able to let you out of my sight now that I've found you again!"

She raised happy eyes to his. "My answer is—Yes. That is, if you're quite, quite sure that you want me."

Her words were smothered on her lips, as he held her close against his heart and kissed her over and over again.

"If I want you! Oh, my darling, I have wanted you all my life!"

The Wonder of It

DARLING, look at our baby!
Wouldn't you know he's ours?
With his eyes like thine and his smile like mine,
And his ears like little pink flowers;
And he has your nose and he has my chin.
Oh, he is surely ours!

Dearest, our baby's baby!
Is he really so much like us?
Perhaps his hair, or his cunning stare,
Or his manner so credulous?
And yet—he may be the "other side."
Oh, does he look like us?

Dear one, could we live always
Seeing the babes to come;
Would they have your smile, would they have my guile,
Or even the shape of our thumb?
Or would we be lost in the limitless sea
Of the strange new souls to come?

—*Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift*

Jungle Sweetheart

"You have put me into a position where I have to marry you," he told her, harshly. Would her mad escapade lose her the very love she had schemed to gain?

By Marjorie Gleyre

Author of "Paper Doll Bride," etc.

"NEDDA! If you keep mooning over that picture you'll never fall in love with a real man," said Maude in a slightly exasperated tone.

Nedda lifted dreamy eyes from the picture that hung just above the desk, and regarded her friend seriously.

"That *is* a real man," she defended.

"You know what I mean! It's no one you'll ever meet. You don't even know his name!"

Nedda turned back to the picture. It was just a print cut from the rotogravure section of some paper, showing a young man in football togs. He held his visor in his hand, so his crop of rather curly dark hair showed to advantage; and he was grinning, a wide, whole-souled grin that seemed to come straight from his heart.

Maude was right: Nedda did not even know his name. Several years ago, won by that curly head and attractive grin, she had cut the picture out of the paper, with the thought: "There's a man I could love." Many times since she had regretted not having kept his name, but she always stilled the thought by asking herself

what good it would do her to know his name?

"A bird at the door is worth two on the wall," parodied Maude as the loud honking of a car was heard outside. She went to the mirror to put on her hat and make-up. "Won't you come after all, Nedda?" she asked.

"Two's company—" replied Nedda, significantly.

"But Jim told me particularly to bring you along."

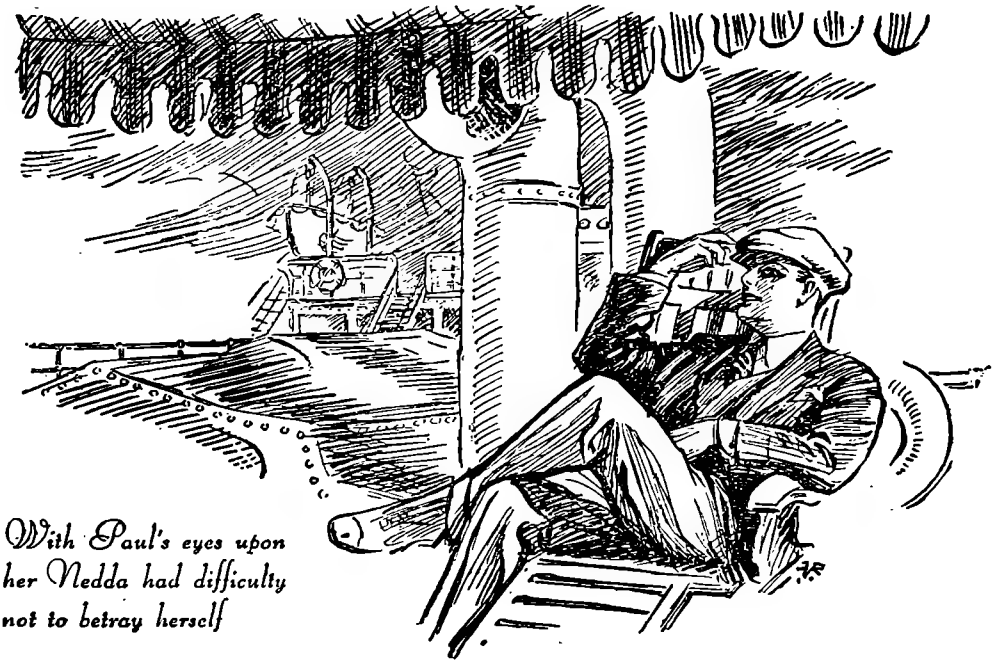
"Thanks, Maude. And thank Jim for me. But my head aches a little, and I think I'll just stay in and rest."

"Well, if that's the way you feel—" said Maude; but a little undercurrent of relief ran through her words in spite of herself. "You know we'd love to have you."

She stopped on her way to the door to drop a kiss on the top of Nedda's head. "'By, honey. Get a good rest."

Nedda, left alone, gave a little sigh. She wished she knew some one to call for her and take her out on this glorious Saturday afternoon. But though she got along splendidly with all of the other girls' boy friends, she could not seem to get one for herself.

The trouble was that she did not know how to act toward them. If a man she met had a girl she was just her natural, straightforward self with him; but when the man was quite unattached she felt that something was expected of her in the way of trying to charm him. So she aped the other girls, quite disguising her own attractive personality, and not succeeding at all in her adopted rôle. Coyness and flirtatiousness little became this girl who had been brought up to be her father's companion.



With Paul's eyes upon her Nedda had difficulty not to betray herself

IN the first place Mr. Kemble had craved a son. When the much-looked-forward-to baby turned out to be a girl, he called her Nedda instead of Ned, and consoled himself by

treating her pretty much as though she were a boy. Her mother died when she was very young, so her dad had her quite to himself. When she grew older she accompanied him on his vacations—mostly hunting trips, for he was an enthusiastic amateur huntsman. Nedda herself had come to be a very good shot.

Just that last fall, before they started off for their usual hunting trip, she had bet him—in a spirit of fun—that she could pass for a boy anywhere. After looking her over contemplatively he had said:

"I bet you could. But just to make life exciting I'll take you up on that."

He had delighted in getting her clothes for the masquerade until she was completely outfitted. And Nedda made a perfect—if somewhat delicate—boy. With her slim boyish figure and close cropped hair she appeared to be a very good-looking youngster. Her naturally low, husky voice stood her in good stead; and she had been careful not to laugh—for her laugh was tinkling, like staccato bells, and was the most charmingly feminine thing about her.

As Nedda recalled that happy time she could not keep the tears from her eyes. Only a year ago! But how much had happened since! Pneumonia had taken her dear father from her in the winter, and left her with a drear loneliness that even her close companionship with Maude could not assuage.

For a few minutes she looked at the smiling face of the picture, then her frown departed and she smiled back. "If I could meet *you*—" she began confidently, paused, and finished sadly— "Oh! you wouldn't be interested in me either. I simply don't attract men!"

Her lip trembled.

"I hate the whole works!" she stormed. "I hate my stupid job—nothing but stupid letters all day long—tied to a stupid desk—stupid people all around me— Mercy!" She caught herself up suddenly in the midst of this complaining. "I need a walk in the fresh air. It doesn't help to sit around pitying myself!"

She brought a newspaper home with her from her walk, and when she started to look through it she got the idea of reading the *Want Ads*, just to see if a more enticing job were listed. One stood out in bold black type:

> Young man wanted. Expert secretary, to accompany African expedition. Courage and marksmanship a requisite. Apply Sunday 10 to 12 A.M.

"Now *that* would be in my line," she said aloud to herself. "I'm a good shot, and I'd simply love to go on an African expedition. Why do they want a man? Just my luck!"

She went on reading the paper, but her mind kept returning to that fascinating advertisement. Until presently the thought came to her that if she really was so keen on that African expedition she might try to impersonate the required young man! It would not be the first time she had done it!

She clapped her hands together excitedly. After all, why not? Here was a chance for adventure. Her boy's clothes were in a trunk in the basement storeroom.

"I'm going to answer that ad," she determined, "and if luck is with me I will go to Africa!"

THE next morning, while Maude peacefully enjoyed her extra Sunday morning sleep, Nedda arose and donned her shirt and trousers. She still wore a very short hair

cut, so by combing it a little more severely than usual she got the desired masculine effect.

Her plan was to call at the given address about nine o'clock, in order to forestall other possible competitors. The address was that of an apartment in the East Eighties, in a good and rather expensive neighborhood.

Nedda was pretty weak in the knees when she started out, especially when she passed the first traffic cop. But no one seemed to stare at her unduly, so she decided she could carry it through.

When the housekeeper ushered her into the presence of Mr. Rombard she was surprised to see a rather young man bending over a camera by the window. He looked up—and she gave a gasp of surprise — she had met him somewhere! Then he said "How d'ye do" with a wide, pleasant grin—and she knew him!

He was the man whose picture hung over her desk at home! No mistaking that grin, or that dark, curly hair.

Her heart beat a frenzied tattoo against her ribs, while she stepped forward mechanically and took the chair he had indicated.

He fingered his camera and stared at her until she wondered if those keen eyes penetrated her disguise.

"You look awfully young," he said at last.

"I'm nearly twenty!" she announced with dignity.

"That's young. But you don't look even that old. Can you shoot?"

"I'm a good shot—I've hunted with my father all my life."

"Good! I'm not a hunter," he explained; "that is, not with a gun. My purpose is to photograph wild animal life. But you never know when you may be called upon to shoot to save your life!"

She nodded understandingly.

"Can you take notes and use a portable?" he asked next. "I'm collecting data for a book."

He reached for a pad on the table and tossed it to her. "Try it."

Thereupon he gave some rapid dictation, which she almost missed for listening to his voice! When she read it back to him he seemed satisfied.

"Say, didn't you make a mistake in the time?" he asked irrelevantly. "The ad said ten to twelve."

"No," she confessed meekly. "I came early on purpose. I want the job."

He grinned at her. "How about nerves? You won't get panicky in the jungle, will you?"

"I don't think so."

Then something came to her mind to startle her. How did they live in the jungle? "How about sleeping quarters?" she asked diffidently. What if she were expected to sleep in the same room with him?

"You're not afraid to sleep alone?" he demanded, as if he had caught the slight uncertainty in her tone and misinterpreted it. "I never have any one in my tent—I'm erratic at night—bounce up at any old hour to make notes and so forth. So I don't want to feel that I'm disturbing any one. There'll be native boys sleeping right outside your tent, though."

"I won't be afraid," she assured him, relieved. "I like to sleep alone!"

"I guess the job is yours!" he decided. "And I'm spared the agony of interviewing callow youths. I think we'll get along fine together—what did you say your name was?"

"Ned Kemble."

"Write your address and phone on the pad, Ned Kemble. I'll give you a ring later in the week for an appoint-

ment when we can discuss all arrangements. I'm planning to leave the first of next month."

Only when Nedda was well on her way home did she recall that she had taken no references with her! The surprising thing was that her new employer had not asked for them.

"MAUDE, I'm going to Africa!" she shouted, bursting into the apartment.

Maude, who was having a late breakfast very much in negligee, sprang for the bedroom door, clutching her gown about her, at the sight of a strange young man.

"Maude, don't run away!"

Still a bit disconcerted Maude checked her flight. "It's your voice all right," she said, "but not your accustomed gender. Why the masquerade, old dear?"

"I answered an ad—"

"Nedda! You never went on the street in those clothes!"

"I did. And he thought I was a boy—and I got the job—and Maude!" she ended with an excited shriek, "who do you think he is?"

"A darn fool!"

"Him!" Nedda pointed dramatically to her picture. "Himself! His name is Paul Rombard, and he's an African big game photographer, and he's simply wonderful!"

"All I have to say," commented Maude, "is that I'm glad you've at last found a man you think is simply wonderful. Now suppose you begin at the beginning and tell me all about it."

NEDDA'S one horrible fear that Paul might have engaged only one stateroom was quickly dissolved. It seemed that he always wanted a room to himself at night wherever he was. So he had procured a private room for her, also.

She chuckled as she unpacked the things that were necessary. All men's clothes! Men's toilet articles—even a razor for appearances. The only thing that might remind her of her girlish past was her picture of Paul Rombard. That, she decided, would go with her wherever she went. Now that she had met the original, the reproduction meant more to her than ever before.

The first few days on the water were marvelous. Nedda was with Paul most of the time as they did not make other acquaintances at first. They did a little work, for he had a few letters and notes to transcribe; but mostly they just talked.

"You know," he told her once, "I had imagined getting some big husky for secretary—thought he'd be useful in the jungle. But when I saw you, I forgot all about it!"

"Why?" she asked, her heart beating with unnecessary vigor.

He looked at her as if trying to find the answer in her eyes. "I don't know," he confessed. "I liked you at once—I just felt as if I wanted you with me."

"I know something else you forgot," she said boldly.

"What?"

"You forgot to ask me for references." After she had said it she wondered if it was wise, because of course she had no references.

"Your character shows in your face," he replied, "and I tried out your ability as secretary. So what more was there?"

"That's very nice of you, Mr. Rombard."

"Better call me Paul," he suggested. "We're going to be pretty close pals, and we might as well chuck formality."

"All right—Paul," she said slowly, and was surprised at the pleasure it gave her to call him that.

One evening she came into the saloon to find Paul surrounded by a bevy of girls. She was not surprised by that—she wondered that it had not happened before since Paul was so attractive. But a feeling of resentment swept over her. Were these girls going to interfere and spoil the good time she and Paul had been having together?

She stood near the door wondering at herself for being so selfish as to want all of Paul's time, until he looked up and saw her. His engaging grin appeared and he beckoned to her.

"Ned, I've just been telling these girls what a fine fellow you are," he said, and made the introductions, while Nedda felt hot and cold by turns.

It was the first time she had had to confront girls of her own age so closely since donning masculine attire, and she was afraid their sharp eyes would find her out.

The ship's orchestra struck up a fox trot. Paul asked a pretty red-headed girl to dance, and Nedda knew the three other girls were expectantly waiting for her to ask one of them.

"Sorry," she said, "but I don't dance."

"We'll teach you," they cried in unison, and tried to overwhelm her objections.

Somehow she made her escape and fled down to her own cabin. This was something she had not taken into consideration. She had thought only of being in the African jungle with Paul and the natives. She had forgotten the trip to Africa, where she would be thrown with many people and have to face them in the daily round of life.

But in the end, that was not what troubled her. She fell asleep with the vision of Paul going off with that red-headed girl!

"WHERE did you disappear to last night, Young Pal?" Paul asked her at breakfast.

"I don't dance," she said stiffly, "so I thought I'd better clear out."

"Don't dance!" he exclaimed incredulously. "I never would have suspected that of a good looking kid like you. You'll never be a lady-killer if you don't dance."

"That's not my ambition," she retorted frostily.

Of course when Paul grinned Nedda warmed up. She never could resist his grin. But later in the morning when she saw him playing deck tennis with the red-head her good temper vanished. That girl was going to spoil everything, she reflected savagely.

At dinner she remarked with forced carelessness, "That girl with the red hair is rather pretty, isn't she?"

"Oh! So you've been caught in her net, too?" Paul replied. "Yes, she's a good sport."

Paul spent most of the afternoon and evening with the "good sport" as Nedda took pains to ascertain. She was sitting on the boat deck in the dark feeling very lonely and abused when Paul came up and settled down beside her.

"You're getting pretty fond of redhead, aren't you?" she observed acridly.

He turned and peered into her face in the dim light. "Jealous, are you?" he accused.

Jealous! In a flash of self-revelation she realized that it was the truth. She was jealous because Paul left her for that girl. And it was because she loved him! She had loved him from the moment when she first saw him. But how could he know she was jeal-

ous? Did he suspect that she was a girl? Had he found her out? Fright tied her tongue.

After a lengthy silence he laid a hand on her arm and gave it a friendly squeeze. "Don't be cross with me,

Nedda tried the same tactics on every girl Paul looked at twice

Young Pal!" he said gently. "If you want the red-head go after her. I won't stand in your way. I'll risk being ungallant to tell you that *she* has done most of the pursuing."

Nedda saw then that Paul thought she was jealous of *him* because the girl preferred his society! She almost laughed with relief, but checked herself in time. That was the one thing she must never do. Nothing would give her away more quickly than her laugh!

"I'm not exactly jealous, Paul," she searched for words that would relieve the situation. "You're so darn popular that it gives me an inferiority complex. I rather fancied the red head—"

"See here!" he interrupted. "Get me straight on this. I'm not interested in that girl or any other on this boat."

This talk with Paul gave Nedda an idea. The idea was to rush the red headed girl herself, and thus keep her away from Paul. It worked beautifully because Paul made no effort to rival his young friend, and Nedda flattered red head so that she could not help liking to be with her—or him, as she thought.

Nedda tried the same tactics on every other girl whom she saw with Paul more than two or three times.

"And you said you were no lady-killer!" Paul reproached her once. "You take away all my girls."

"If you wanted 'em you could keep 'em," Nedda replied lightly.

BRITISH EAST AFRICA. Trekking along a clay road and gradually over the plains themselves toward the shores of the Athi River.

Nedda could hardly believe it was

real. It seemed to her as if she were part of a moving picture. But when she looked at Paul she knew it was real —Paul was the realest thing in her life! He was driving the second hand car while the truck bearing the camera paraphernalia and the native boys followed.

"I've never seen so many animals before in my life!" exclaimed Nedda, as a herd of gazelles appeared on the distant plain.

"Look!" he warned, nodding to the left behind them.

Scampering over the rolling grass lands came a group of zebras, as if racing the car. They sped along until they had outdistanced it, then went slipping and sliding across the road and stood at its side sniffing and watching curiously as the small caravan passed by.

"Aren't they tame!" she marvelled, "and so cute!"

"They aren't exactly tame," laughed Paul. "But I think they are friendly. Most of these wild animals will not fight unless suddenly frightened or attacked."

The site Paul picked for camp was almost like a park, with big mimosas casting their thick shade over the ground, while between their trunks could be seen a bit of the winding river and a cliff in the distance. The boys put up two tents for Paul and Nedda, and built lean-tos of grassy boughs for themselves.

A little bit of Eden, Nedda thought, until Paul wanted to pull something out of his pocket and dropped his bill-folder. As he picked it up a square of paper fluttered out and Nedda stooped to recover it. It landed face up and she saw that it was a photo of a girl, a pretty aristocratic young face full of confidence. As she handed it back to him she felt the hot blood beating at her temples, and she bit her lip in an effort at control.

"That's the one and only woman in my life," said Paul, as he carefully replaced the photo.

"She's very lovely," Nedda forced through dry lips.

"Yes, isn't she?" he observed, complacently. "Some day you must meet her—you'll like her, I'm sure."

After that even the beauty of their first African sunset could not charm Nedda.

She walked down to the river with Paul, and while they stood there the distant hills seemed bathed in red fire for a moment and then faded to a cold blue.

"Isn't it glorious, boy?" asked Paul in an awed tone.

"The sun sets over the Palisades, too," she returned, perversely, "and it's just as beautiful."

He looked down at her reproachfully, as if she had failed him in a big moment. She turned abruptly away, unable to face that silent accusation, tears in her eyes.

Then Japtha, one of the boys, whistled to summon them to dinner. As they walked back to camp the sudden jabbering of a baboon made Nedda jump nervously. When Paul again looked at her sharply, she realized that she would have to curb her nerves if she expected to play her rôle successfully.

She knew Paul was becoming fond of her, and did not want to do anything to forfeit his good opinion. She loved the way he said "Young Pal" and she loved his way of treating her as a favorite comrade. That is, she loved it when she could forget how much she would rather have him treat her as a girl, a beloved girl! But since that could not be, she cherished his

friendship, and craved his good opinion.

NEDDA lay wide eyed staring into the darkness. At first the voices and occasional laughter of the boys kept her company; but finally they dispersed to their lean-tos and silence fell—the silence of the African night, which is not silence at all.

Nedda became increasingly aware of the noise of beasts: the weird laughter of hyenas, the angry snarling of wild cats, the consumptive cough of the leopard, the shrill bark of the zebra so like that of a dog. She drew her blanket up over her ears to shut out the fearsome sounds. But even through the blanket she could hear the distant pounding of mysterious hoofs, the rush of herds crossing the plain.

She lay there shivering and wondering what was to prevent some beast from entering her tent and devouring her as she lay helpless. How could Paul and the boys sleep so unconcernedly. Cautiously she freed her ears to find out if the sounds were perhaps getting nearer. The sudden deep-toned roar of a lion reverberating over the river like a trumpet brought her upright in terror.

She could not stay alone! She could not remain in the dark with those terrible noises.

In a panic she rushed from her tent to Paul's. But with her hand on the flap about to raise it, with his name trembling on her lips, she checked herself. She saw again the look he had given her when the cry of the baboons made her jump. If he did not already think her a coward, he certainly would if she woke him up to tell him she was afraid. She could not bear his scorn!

Suddenly becoming aware that she was standing alone in the night, she flew to her tent, ducked into her blanket head and all, and lay shaking until sleep mercifully claimed her.

The next morning Paul remarked that she looked rather pale and heavy-eyed.

"I was too excited to sleep!" she explained brightly.

As it was a dull day there was no chance for photography, but Paul arranged a blind for his camera at the river bank to be in readiness for the sun. The rest of the day he dictated.

Late in the afternoon he was busy by himself, so Nedda picked up a gun and slipped off. Her plan was to shoot a gazelle for their larder and surprise Paul with it; then he would see what a fine fellow she was! She had gone only a short distance from camp when she saw a herd of Tommies—as the Thomson's gazelles were familiarly called—a little way off, feeding on the plain.

She was unfamiliar with her gun, as it was a double-barreled elephant-gun. Nevertheless she aimed and pulled both triggers. The recoil from one barrel would have been hard for her to stand up under, but the unexpectedly severe concussion from two sent her rolling over the ground, half stunned, while the rifle flew through the air and speared barrel-down into the ground.

The sound of the shot brought Paul on the run, and when he saw Nedda on the ground he dashed toward her, his face full of anxious concern. Nedda, coming out of her daze and seeing his approach, had only one thought—to get to her feet before he tried to lift her up. If he took her in his arms her secret would probably be discovered.

"What happened?" he demanded tersely, putting a steadying hand under her arm. "Are you hurt?"

"The gun kicked," she replied, turning white at his touch. She wanted to fling her arms about his neck and take comfort from his warm strength. Instead, she had to pull a stiff upper lip and quell her jumping nerves.

"We'll go shooting *together,* next time," he said quietly.

But the next day was bright and Paul spent most of his time with his camera in the blind by the river. Without success, however. The animals that came down to drink, looked at the thorn screen, sniffed suspiciously, and went further up or down the river to drink.

"We'll have to try something else," he decided after the unfruitful day. "I'll give you a lesson in working the moving-picture camera, Ned, and then we'll go out stalking our game. I'm very anxious to get some good views of the rhinos."

SO the next morning they were up at dawn and started out with a couple of the boys to carry the camera outfit.

Nedda, walking along beside Paul, was in the best of spirits and ready for any adventure that might befall. But when Paul reached out and put his arm about her shoulders in chummy fashion, a tremor ran through her. His touch was beginning to set fire to her blood and she recognized the danger of it. With the excuse of a loosened shoe lace she bent and freed herself from his arm, and after that she kept a distance between them.

The first picture was a long distance one of a herd of antelope. They were grazing slowly along, unconscious that they were observed, so Paul had time to put his long-focus lens on the camera and grind several feet of film.

Then he wanted some action.

"Fire a shot, Ned," he suggested, "and let's see them run."

The herd went bounding off at the sound and Paul shouted, "Bravo!" much elated with his first picture.

They trudged along and entered a wooded valley, with the boys in the lead. Suddenly there was a crashing and crunching of branches and a rhinoceros appeared ahead of them. The boys had probably waked him from a nap in the thicket, and he came out confused and frightened.

Every one sprang behind trees and the rhino would probably have gone peacefully off, if Nedda had not decided she would feel safer behind Paul's tree! The rhino looked very large and formidable to her as she stood alone. So she darted out, and just as Paul yelled, "Stay where you are!" the animal saw her and charged.

Despite its size the rhino can move remarkably fast, and Nedda, flying along on wings of fear, could almost feel herself being crushed by the huge hoofs. But before it reached her Paul raised his gun and fired. The rhino staggered a few steps further and then fell heavily to earth.

Nedda, realizing that she was headed for Paul's arms, managed to check herself, and stood white and shaking while he came up with a fierce scowl.

"You damn fool!" he shouted. There was a note in his voice that she had never heard there before, a strained tremulous note. "Are you trying to get yourself killed?"

"I—I'm sorry," she faltered, tears blinding her.

Unexpectedly he grasped her hand and held it tightly. "Lord, Young Pal! That was a narrow escape," he said, and now his voice was husky. "don't take a chance like that again. I don't want to lose you!"

Nedda wanted to carry his hand to her lips, to drop her tears in its palm. Instead, she gave as strong a return pressure as she could and summoned enough voice to say shamefacedly, "I guess I *am* a fool."

That experience rather spoiled the day's expedition, and they decided to return to camp. On the way back, they had a rare bit of luck in surprising a dozen giraffes who stood watching them in amazement. Paul got a good picture, before they chose to be frightened and ran off.

That evening as they sat by the camp fire, Nedda felt very close to Paul in spirit. He was leaning back with his head against the tent pole, eyes closed restfully, pipe held loosely between his teeth, and as the red glow of the fire illuminated his strong clean-cut features she thought he looked like a beautiful piece of bronze sculpture. How she wanted to go over to him and run her fingers through his curly hair! She smiled to herself as she imagined his surprise if he could read the thoughts of his "pal."

Suddenly he stirred and sat up. With his eyes open, keenly alight as ever, he radiated energy.

"Come on, Young Pal," he cried, "let's get our notes of the day down while they are fresh in my mind. Your escape will make a spicy bit!"

"Are you going to put me in your book?" she asked delightedly. "Then you won't forget me, will you?" There was a wistful note to the question.

"Forget you!" He seemed genuinely vexed. "Why should I ever forget you, Ned? I hope we'll keep on being good friends when we get back to civilization. Won't we?"

"I guess so," she replied with as much assurance as she could muster.

She knew that after the trip she must part from Paul forever, because she would have to give up her disguise and be herself again. And she could never face him as a girl—not after their intimacy on this expedition! The thought saddened her, and she sat mutely staring into the fire and wishing things were different.

"What do you see in the fire that makes you look so gloomy?" he inquired presently.

She started and gave him a quick, warm smile. "I'm just tired," she offered as explanation.

"Let's turn in then," he said, rising and resting a hand on her shoulder.

Involuntarily she recoiled—because she liked it too well. He noticed it and withdrew his hand quickly with a surprised question in the sharp look he gave her.

"I bumped that shoulder to-day," she forced herself to say, "and it's pretty sore." How she hated to lie to Paul, even about a small thing; but what else could she do?

IN the days that followed Paul and Nedda got some excellent pictures of antelopes, impallas, oryxes, and zebras. But they did not have such good luck with the rhinos.

"As soon as we get the rhinos," Paul planned, "we can move after elephants."

He turned away with a fit of coughing, and Nedda looked up anxiously. He had been caught in a storm the day before and foolishly let his wet clothing dry on him because, as he said, it was too much trouble to change and he would have to take them off again anyway at bedtime! Her arguments had fallen on deaf ears.

"See, Paul," she rebuked. "I told you to change. Now you take this"—she held out a box of pellets—"and

then go and lie down. Is your throat sore?"

"Rather."

He obligingly took a pill. But when she wanted to bandage his throat with some kind of a compress, he objected. "I'm not sick, Ned."

"But you are likely to be if you don't take care of yourself," she retorted.

"Where did you learn doctoring?" he laughed.

"I—I—" She thought quickly. "I learned first aid as a Boy Scout. Now lie down and let me fix this."

She began to pat and pull his pillow into shape.

"Oh, get out!" he ordered gruffly. "You're as fussy as a girl."

She dropped the pillow and stood for an instant petrified by the accusation. Then without a word she turned and walked stiffly away. If he thought her as fussy as a girl, the next thing might be his guessing that she was one!

Later he came out to her and put both hands on her shoulders, trying to look into her eyes. But she turned her head away and would not smile in response to his conciliating grin.

She ached to go to him, to touch his hair—But he thought her a boy

"Still huffy, Ned?" he asked.

"No, it's all right," she said huskily, but dared not meet his eyes. She was fighting her desire to reach up and kiss him! With his hands on her shoulders all she could think of was how much she wanted them to close about her and draw her to him!

Her heart beat for him alone—and he would never know it! Too much stood between them: her masquerade was bad enough, but the girl whose picture he carried was the final obstacle.

AT last they had a good opportunity for the rhino picture. They were out about a quarter of a mile from camp when they saw a beautiful specimen asleep at the edge of a little valley. He stood as if posed for a picture, a massive iron-clad figure tinged with white clay dust, with his Roman profile broken by the horn which rose trenchantly behind his nose clearly outlined against a rock.

Paul set up the camera and filmed a few feet. Then he put Nedda in charge of it, with instructions to start cranking as soon as he snapped his fingers, which he would do when he got near enough to the sleeping beauty. Nedda stood with her hand on the crank alertly following Paul's progress and waiting for his signal. It was the first time he had given her charge of the filming, and she was burning with eagerness to do it well.

Just as he snapped his fingers she saw the rhino rouse into life. At the same time another one, whose presence they had not suspected, stepped out from behind the rock. The two of them snorted and squinted with their beady near-sighted little eyes, milling around and stamping their flat feet—while Nedda ground out film. Then one started forward with a stiff-legged, jouncing trot, and the other followed. Suddenly they both seemed to sense the intruder. Down came their heads, and they broke into a gallop, making straight for Paul.

The moment they started their advance Nedda forgot to crank in her fear for Paul. He had left his gun with his gun-bearer and stood defenseless as the beasts came rushing on. Nedda sprang forward, gripping her gun, her whole thought centered on saving Paul. Her hands trembled as she raised the weapon to her shoulder, but she grit her teeth and prayed for steadiness as she took aim.

Just as she was about to pull the trigger the two rhinos, for no apparent reason, veered aside and went rapidly off. Her hand dropped to her side and she stood with pounding heart and pallid face, watching their flight across the plain.

"Bully picture!" shouted Paul, turning toward the camera, as cool as if there had been no danger. "Keep cranking, Ned, until they are out of sight."

Then he saw that she was not cranking, that she was not even at the camera.

"For the Lord's sake!" he exploded, in exasperation and disappointment.

At that she realized what she had done, and a wave of distress swept over her. Her premature fear had cost Paul a marvelous picture! Unable to face his disappointment, humiliated at her failure, she thrust her gun into the hands of Japtha, who stood near by, and ran for camp.

Dashing into her tent, she sank weeping on the cot. The more she tried to stop crying, the harder she sobbed. The thought that she had spoiled a picture, and that Paul was angry, was more than she could bear.

Suddenly she felt a hand on her shoulder, and her sobs came to an abrupt end. Dread paralyzed her; she could not move and could scarcely breathe.

Paul had caught her crying! Perhaps she had given herself away!

"Never mind, Ned," he said with such unexpected kindness that she almost wept again. "We'll get other chances as good as that."

"I—I thought they were going to get you," she said in a muffled voice, keeping her tear-stained face averted.

"What if they did?" he said carelessly. "The boys would get you safely back."

"Paul!" She sprang to her feet to face him with eyes blazing. But then she shrank back abashed, remembering her tear-swollen eyes. "I suppose you do think me a baby—"

"Not at all!" he interrupted sharply. "I shouldn't have said that. I did not mean it."

"If anything happened to you—" She choked, swallowed hard, but could not go on.

Paul looked worried. "Let's not get sentimental," he said brusquely. "Just because we've grown to mean a lot to each other we must not act like a couple of gushing girls."

She felt herself flushing furiously. Again he had compared her to a girl.

He stepped to the door of the tent, but turned back to say, "After this, Ned, whichever one of us is at the camera must stick to his post and keep cranking until the last possible moment. When the danger gets really formidable, then it will be time enough to fire. Usually these animals are frightened and not ferocious. They are more apt to go off, as they did today, than to continue the attack. Hyenas are the only ones that mean to be nasty."

Then he left her, and she abandoned herself to her misery. She regretted ever having entered on such a foolhardy escapade. It was growing increasingly hard to be with Paul. Her love for him had become so deep and strong that she longed to have him know her as a man knows a woman. This comradeship was tantalizing. But it could be no more than that in any case; for there was the girl of the picture—the "one and only woman in his life."

For her it remained only to go on with the ghastly make-believe and try to erase the impression of cowardice and weakness which she had undoubtedly created.

AS the sun was peeking up over the sky-line they set off for the day's camera hunt.

Nedda was gloomy because Paul had hardly noticed her except for the formality of a "good morning." She supposed it was because he considered her a weakling who could not stick to his post. The thought made her miserable.

She tramped behind him in silence until she could stand it no longer. Taking a few running steps, she fell into stride beside him, but he stalked on as if unaware of her presence. She moistened her lips and coaxed forth her reluctant voice.

"Paul!"

He made a little grunting sound to show that he had heard, but did not look around.

"You know, yesterday, I—I—" she began, and found it painfully difficult to continue without any encouragement from him. Quickly she thought what to say to put herself back in his good graces. "It was nerves, I guess. You see, before I answered your ad, I was sick — nervous breakdown — and the doctor said I should take another month's complete rest before doing anything."

She paused and threw a wistful look at him.

"Then you had no business to come on this trip," he said bluntly.

"I'm sorry if I'm not the help you expected," she muttered abjectly.

He halted, turning to face her.

"I'm a bear this morning, kid," he said quickly. "Forgive me, won't you?"

Her feet became suddenly light, and she stepped briskly along in contrast to her leaden plodding of a short time before. She had lied shamelessly—but for once she felt that it was worth it. She found a guilty conscience easier to bear than his contempt!

Before they had gone much farther there was a rustle in the brush, and out came a group of ostriches. With their little heads set on snaky necks, and their round black bodies that looked for all the world like bouncing rubber balls as they swaggered along, crossing one long thick leg in front of the other, they made such an absurd picture that Nedda started to laugh spontaneously.

But as the sound smote her own ears she was aghast and tried to change it to a hiccough, as Paul looked wonderingly around. With a puzzled frown he turned back to his camera, and she could not be sure whether he was suspicious or not. If he thought it really a hiccough, it might pass muster. But if he knew she had laughed, the game was up, because no man or grown boy —outside of a side show in a circus— could laugh like that!

Later Paul shot a zebra for food for the boys, but had to leave it, as they would need the Ford to carry it back to camp. "I'll come for it later," he said.

And then they found their rhinos!

They came to the top of a hill that overlooked a wooded valley, in which half a dozen or so rhinos were browsing stupidly about.

"Here's our chance," said Paul. "We've got to get it this time."

But when they approached, the wind veered and carried their scent to the keen nostrils of the beasts, which promptly lumbered off. All except one, which remained asleep under a tree. Paul set the camera and asked Nedda to crank.

"*This* time I'll stick to my post," she promised earnestly.

As he went forward with one of the boys to draw a charge, the rhino awoke and started away. He fired a shot in front of it to turn it back into range of the lens, and the shot was so successful that the beast came thundering toward him with surprising rapidity considering its bulk.

Nedda, grinding for all she was worth, saw its temper change as it got the full scent. It gave an enraged snort. Its little pointed ears stood up, its ratty eyes gleamed ferociously, and its silly rope-like tail stuck straight out behind as it put its head down and came faster and faster.

"Why doesn't Paul fire?" she worried, full of fear for him. Was he going to wait too long in his blind enthusiasm for his picture? This rhino did not look as if it would change its mind and turn away! If anything happened to Paul— Her brain kept churning in time to her hand on the crank.

Relief swayed her as he raised his gun when the rhino had come within about twenty-five feet and fired. The shot hit it in the neck. Wounded and furious, it swerved and came straight for Nedda and the camera!

For a second her hand faltered, but then took up its appointed task. With her breath coming in short gasps, her knees shaking so that she could hardly stand, and terror draining the blood from her face, she held her ground in

the face of the approaching danger. She must prove to Paul that she was no coward—she must not fail him this time!

She knew that he had emptied both barrels of his gun and she was taking a chance on his reloading in time to save her. Just as she was wondering what it felt like to die, a shot rang out, and the beast fell dead in its tracks.

The sudden release from fear was too much after the strain of the last moments; her legs crumpled up under her and she sank to the ground, while darkness enveloped her.

WHEN she came to her senses she was on her cot at camp, with a wet towel on her head. As her eyes fluttered open she met Paul's solicitous gaze, but to her it seemed full of scorn. What must he think of a fainting boy?

"Are you all right?"

She uttered a weak "Yes."

"I'd like to have a talk with you later—when you feel up to it."

Somehow that sounded ominous, and her eyes darkened with apprehension as they followed his departing figure. Did he know now? Was that it? Or did he merely think her more of a coward than ever? How had she come back to camp? Question after question tormented her muddled brain. If he had carried her, how could he have helped discovering the truth?

As she lay back, too dizzy to keep her eyes open, a half memory came to her—a suggestion that she could not be certain was not a dream. She seemed to recollect that she had regained consciousness to find herself in Paul's arms. Not responsible in her dazed condition, moved by the sweetness of that contact, her arms had closed about his neck and she had dropped her head against his shoulder. Her impression was that he had bent and kissed her. Could it be a fantasy? Could her imagination unaided conceive anything as deliriously stirring as that kiss? Yet it must have been a dream. It was the height of folly to think that he had kissed her, whom he despised.

Too weak to reason, she gave way to the merciful oblivion of sleep.

It was on reluctant feet that she started to go to Paul when she awoke. He was pacing up and down in front of his tent and when he saw her he motioned her to enter.

"I suppose you think yourself smart because you tricked me," he said bitterly.

She was so taken aback at this way of putting it that she could find nothing to say.

"Well, the farce is over—or rather, it is just beginning. We'll break camp to-morrow and go back to Nairobi to get married."

"Get married?" she faltered, clasping and unclasping her hands.

"Of course. Since you have put me in a position where I *have* to marry you."

"You don't have to marry me!" she flared, cut to the quick. "I *won't* marry you."

"Oh, you can get a divorce after a while, if you feel like that about it. I won't hold you to it."

"Then why get married at all?"

"To protect your name—and my position—as well as those connected with me. If this got out it would make a pretty bit of gossip! Do you think any one would believe I was so stupid as not to recognize a girl when I saw one?"

"It needn't get out!"

"It will. Such things always do.

We'd much better go through the form of marriage—then you can divorce me later."

"I certainly shall!" she cried vehemently. "And it can't be too soon!" So he thought she had tricked him, and hated her for it—when she loved him so.

He stared at her scowlingly, shaking his head as if scarcely crediting his own blindness. Now his eyes seemed to find every slight curve of her figure, whereas before he had seen only the accouterments of a boy.

"I don't see why I didn't guess it right away," he muttered. "Why did you do it, anyway?"

"I was tired of the deadly routine of my life. I thought it would be a lark."

"A lark!" he groaned. "You could do it for a lark—without even thinking what it would do to me!"

He dropped his face into his hands, elbows resting on his knees.

"I didn't expect you to find it out," she faltered.

He raised his head and smiled grimly, a smile that was almost a grimace. "If I hadn't found it out, you may be sure some one else would have. Our only safeguard is to get married."

"But it wasn't your fault," she reminded him.

"That doesn't alter the situation."

"I won't marry you!" stormed Nedda, and, covering her face with her hands, she began to cry.

"Crying won't help," he said wearily. "It will be a marriage in name only—you needn't worry about that." He paused, then added bitterly: "Believe me, this is going to be much harder for me than it is for you!"

That reminded her of the picture he carried in his pocket, and the thought was a stab of pain. If it had not been for that "one and only girl" of his, she might have been tempted to marry him—and try to win his love.

"How about your girl—the one in the picture?" she forced herself to ask.

He shrugged dispiritedly. "I think she would agree with me that it is the only thing to do, under the circumstances, despite the position it puts me in."

SHE fled from him. Every word he said showed her how little he wanted her. She felt humiliated to the depths of her soul. She vowed to herself that she would not marry him, she would run away as soon as they reached civilization. Could anything be worse than to have the man she loved marry her against his own inclination? Better that both their reputations be dragged in the dust.

While she was fighting it out with herself she heard the chug of the car and the shouts of the boys, and knew that Paul was going after the zebra. The business of life must go on, despite heartbreaks.

On a sudden impulse she stepped out of her tent to join them. She wanted to accompany him as his pal for the last time.

"Going?" he asked tersely.

"Yes," she replied, uncertain from his tone whether he was annoyed or not, but determined to stick it out.

Nedda lingered behind, while Paul went into the bushes with a couple of boys to help drag the zebra out.

No sooner had he disappeared from her sight than there was a scrambling noise, a yell, shouts from the boys, and an ominous snarling. For a second she stood petrified. Something was there in the bushes—something that was attacking Paul!

She dashed into the thicket.

Parting the bushes, she uttered a scream of stark terror as she saw Paul down on the ground grappling with a hyena, while the boys stood back in stupid fear. He was getting badly mauled, for the cat was in its ugliest humor, having been interrupted while making a feast on the zebra. His attempts at self-defense were pitifully useless.

Nedda, all her muscles taut with horrible apprehension, tried to aim her gun at the beast. But she dared not fire lest she hit Paul, for he and the hyena were rolling over and over tangled together. Was he going to be clawed to death before her eyes?

"Help me, God! Help me, God!" she prayed aloud.

"Ned!" he shouted, hearing her. "Shoot—into—the—air!"

She responded immediately, her panic suppressed in the necessity for action. The hyena paused in its attack, gave a startled look around, and then shot off into the brush.

She was on her knees beside Paul, tears streaming down her face at sight of his ghastly wounds.

He was numb as yet, and had not begun to feel the pain. As she took his torn head gently and rested it on her lap, he said calmly enough:

"Surprising—to find a cat out in the daytime." Then he saw her face. "Don't cry. Let's get back to camp."

The trip back was a nightmare. Trying to direct the boys so they could get Paul into the car with the least pain to him—driving as carefully as she could over the uneven ground—getting him out of the car into his tent—

She tried to dress his wounds, but was frightened nearly out of her senses at their seriousness. She saw that she must get him to a doctor as quickly as possible. The pain had begun to make itself felt, and he was suffering agonies. The sight of his suffering, which she could not allay, drove her almost frantic.

She decided to start at once for Nairobi with Japtha to guide her, leaving the boys to break up camp and follow in the truck. They could make it by nightfall if they left at once, and she had an awful fear that Paul would not survive the night unless he had expert attention.

AFTER Nedda had got Paul to the hospital, given him into the care of a surgeon, and been assured that there was nothing more she could do—she collapsed. The necessity for action had been a stimulant that kept her going in spite of her overstrained nerves. Now that there was no need to keep up, she went altogether to pieces.

They let her sleep it out.

When she finally opened her eyes she could not get her bearings at once. But after staring at the uniformed nurse for a few moments, it all came back to her in an overwhelming rush.

"How is he?" were her first words.

"He's about as torn up as a man can be and still live," the nurse told her. "We don't know yet whether we can pull him through. He is very restless, and that's bad. But we certainly admire your pluck and prompt action!"

Nedda's eyes dropped shut while she sent up a prayer for Paul. She wanted him to be spared—even if it was for that other girl!

Just as she was thinking how she would like to lie in bed for a couple of weeks, the nurse bustled in again to ask:

"Is your name Virginia?"

"It's Ned—Nedda. Why?"

"He keeps talking about Virginia. He said he loves her. He repeats that a

lot—' Virginia, I want you to know I love you.' Then whenever the doctor or I come near he gets terribly excited and says ' I must marry her—I tell you I *must* marry her.' He's brought on a fever, and his condition is precarious."

Nedda drew a long aching sigh before admitting, " It's me he thinks he should marry—and Virginia must be the other girl." She explained the situation.

" I'll tell the doctor and see what he says," said the nurse.

When she had gone off Nedda resolutely brushed from her eyes the tears that had risen. So he loved Virginia! That was not startling news, because she did not suppose he would carry her picture around if he did not love her. But to be told how he was calling for Virginia constantly seemed to make it pretty hard to bear!

" Young lady!" It was the doctor's brisk voice at the door. " Do you feel able to get up?"

" Yes," she said, though her whole weary body stiffened in rebellion.

" You're needed in the other room. That young man is set on marrying you, and I think you'd better humor him."

" Oh, no, doctor!" she begged, with an involuntary shudder. " He doesn't really want to marry me—he thinks he *has* to, because we were on the expedition together. I can't marry him."

The doctor shook his head dubiously. " He insists. In fact, he's worked himself into a dangerous fever over it. The excitement is killing him. If we can't quiet him we can't save him."

She sat up, clasping her hands beseechingly. " You must save him," she cried, with a sob. " Doctor, you *must* save him."

Nedda shrank back into her seat, paralyzed

" Then *you* must marry him."

" But I can't. Don't you see? He loves that other girl."

" It's getting married to you that he is intent on, though."

The nurse, who had been listening

with much interest, came forward diffidently.

"May I make a suggestion?" she said. "Why not have a mock marriage, just to quiet him? He'll think he's married and will stop worrying. And the young lady will have her own way, too."

"Hm-m." The doctor purred consideringly, then with a rush of energy agreed. "Yes, that's what we'll do. I'll get some one to dress like a minister—and you be ready in ten minutes, young lady."

AS Nedda followed the nurse down the corridor to Paul's room, her legs were trembling so that she could scarcely walk. She was going to see Paul! She felt hot and cold by turns, wondering if she could refrain from flinging her arms about him and kissing him as she did in her dreams.

When she entered he was lying still with his eyes closed, most of his face hidden by bandages.

Nedda tiptoed across the room and knelt by the bed. As she did so his eyes snapped open.

"Hello, Young Pal," he muttered. He tried to raise his hand, but could not manage it.

"Are we going to get married?" he demanded.

She nodded. "The doctor is bringing—"

Just then the doctor came in with a man who looked like a minister.

"Here we are!" he boomed cheerfully, and whistled a few bars of the wedding march.

As he turned aside he winked at Nedda, and patted her cheek encouragingly.

"The patient is better already," he told her in an aside. "As soon as the knot is tied he'll probably go quietly to sleep—and that's what will give him a new lease on life."

"Ned!" he cried. "Stand up! I love you, Ned!"

They all gathered about the bed. Nedda sat beside Paul and laid her hand in his bandaged one. The words of the ceremony sounded very solemn to her, and she felt that she was really being married to him, although she knew it was only a pretense. How she wished it was a real marriage, and that Paul wanted her for herself!

When it was over she rose to go, but he detained her with a fervent, "Stay with me, Ned."

She looked at the doctor for orders and he motioned her to remain. So

she sat down again and put one hand in Paul's, and with the other hand gently touched the small part of his forehead that showed between the bandages. With a contented smile he closed his eyes and before long his heavy breathing announced that he slept.

During the next few days Paul called for "Virgina" constantly. When that brought no response he would ask for "Ned." Her presence seemed to bring him peace and quiet, and he was content to lie with her hand in his. He scarcely ever spoke to her, though once he murmured: "You are my wife!" in a tone which seemed to suggest that it was a preposterous thing.

Nedda kept herself at his beck and call until the doctor pronounced him absolutely out of danger and well on the road to recovery—which, however, would be a matter of months. Then she began to make the necessary plans for herself.

"Will a shock hurt Paul now?" she asked the doctor earnestly.

"That all depends."

"Not a serious shock," she explained. "Rather a pleasant one. I thought I would go home. I will leave a note explaining that it was not a real marriage, and I guess he will be glad to be relieved of the responsibility of me, and to be free to marry his Virginia."

She spent a great deal of time and thought on that note trying to decide what was best to say. At first she had written a mere statement of facts, formal and cold. But she tore it up. A strong urge to pour out her whole heart possessed her; after she had gone it would not matter whether Paul knew that she loved him, and it would ease her heart to tell him. So she wrote:

PAUL, DEAR:

I want you to know you are free—free to marry that girl in the picture, the Virginia you are always calling for.

You see, this time I really did "trick" you! You were distressing yourself so dangerously about marrying me that the doctor said I would have to do so to save you. But, Paul, I *couldn't* marry you—not for the reason you think, but for just the opposite. *I love you.* I have loved you ever since I first met you. And loving you I could not bear to marry you unless you reciprocated my feeling.

So the doctor suggested a mock ceremony—it would bind no one, and it would quiet you. This was carried out—and you were saved.

I shall never forget you. I have so many happy memories of our good times together. And I shall try to be happy in the thought of your happiness with Virginia.

Your Pal, NED.

The tears were falling thickly by the time she came to the end of her letter, but she blotted them carefully and put the letter away in its envelope to be given to Paul after she was gone.

NEDDA sat back in her deck chair watching some young tourists play shuffle-board. She had planned to stay awhile in Paris, but when she got there she was too restless to enjoy it. She wanted frightfully to get home.

Fortunately Paul had given her half her salary in advance, so she had enough money to get back home with and to live on until she got a job. There were a nice bunch of young tourists on board, having lots of gayety and fun, but she felt too sad to mix with them. All she could think of was Paul, her poor Paul still lying helpless in the hospital.

Sometimes she reproached herself for leaving him, but she knew that the

longer she stayed the harder it would have been. On the whole, she thought she had acted wisely. For now he could send for Virginia. When a jealous pang smote her at the thought of that other girl, she told herself firmly that she might as well get used to it.

But when she went down to her cabin for a book, and the picture of Paul fell out of her writing portfolio and lay grinning up at her from the floor, she flung herself on the bunk in a storm of tears.

Later, she picked up the picture, crumpled it into a hard little ball in her fist and went out on deck. Standing at the rail she threw it into the dark blue water below her. The minute it had left her hand regret seized her, and she almost sprang into the sea after it. She thought she might as well, as to go on living without Paul. Dropping her head into her arms on the rail, she fought with her desperation. She did not cry—it had gone beyond tears.

A voice roused her—tore her from her dangerous thoughts and brought her back to sanity.

"*Mademoiselle,* may I have a few moments of your time? I wish to speak to you on a matter of business."

It was a cultured voice with a foreign accent.

Slowly she raised her head. She found the speaker to be a middle-aged man of distinguished appearance immaculately clad.

"If you will come to my deck we can talk quite comfortably," he said with a conciliating smile.

Nedda let herself be led to the first class division, and presently was seated beside the man waiting apathetically to hear what he had to say. Her senses were still too dulled from her emotional conflict to be very alert as to what was going on.

"You have exactly the figure I have been looking for!" was the surprising introduction. "I am Georges DuGarde—importer of French gowns. And you?"

"My name is Nedda Kemble."

"I will explain my position, Mlle. Kemble. I have a fashion show one afternoon during the voyage. My model fails me at the last moment, misses the boat apparently. I am destitute. I look always since we leave shore for one who has the requisite figure. I do not find her. Then I see *mademoiselle*—I follow her—I study her contour—"

His whole speech was accompanied by expressive gestures and grimaces betraying his French nationality.

Nedda listened with increasing surprise and finally exclaimed:

"But you must be mistaken! I have a figure like a boy—I have even passed for a boy."

"*Mais oui!*" he cried delightedly. "It is for the gown to disclose the subtle feminine contour."

In the end Nedda consented to model his gowns for him. It was something to do to take her mind off herself, and the salary was not to be scorned. Besides, this impetuous Frenchman with his combination of childlike enthusiasm and shrewd business sense, interested her.

M. DuGarde procured a first class cabin for her, and put a complete wardrobe at her disposal. That was part of the job; to wear his gowns all the time and thus display them to the passengers.

It was pleasant enough, this dressing in such frocks and suits as she had never dreamed of possessing. At first she hated the conspicuousness of her position, but she soon got used to it and began to take a professional pride

in the attention that M. DuGarde's creations received.

THE men seemed to be even more interested than the women, and she usually had a group of them around her. Some one was always seeing that she got her tea, or begging her to play deck tennis or cards; and in the evening she never lacked for dancing partners. She enjoyed it all in her modest way, and it helped to keep the ache for Paul submerged.

The funny part of it was that she did not realize it was herself and not the clothes that attracted the men, until the last day out when one ardent youth actually proposed to her! It startled her so that she could hardly reply—not just the proposal, but the knowledge which it brought that at last she was popular with men! She vaguely realized that it was because she had not tried to be other than her own sweet self. She had not tried to interest them—because Paul was all men to her.

She refused the young man. The proposal only brought to her more strongly that all her love was given to Paul. She knew it would be a long, long time before she could forget him—if indeed she ever did.

She had been such a success as a model while on board ship that M. DuGarde offered her a position in his fashionable establishment in the city. She accepted readily. It was nice to have something to do to earn her living while she got adjusted to the old environment again, and she was in no mood for job hunting.

As soon as she arrived she went to look up Maude, hoping to be able to room with her again. But Maude was no longer there. The superintendent said he thought she had left to get married. As the apartment was rented to some one else, Nedda had to go elsewhere. She found a little room near M. DuGarde's shop, and took up her lonely existence there.

Try as she might, she could not banish Paul from her mind or heart. She had grown to love him so deeply that without him she felt unanchored, as if she were drifting aimlessly on life's sea.

Her work was very pleasant. M. DuGarde treated her with the utmost courtesy and consideration. He had raised her salary, and let her model all his choicest creations. If there was a new *Patou* evening frock to be shown, Nedda was the one to show it. The other girls looked up to her with respect not entirely free from envy. And because the whole atmosphere of the place was so fine, and wearing the beautiful clothes was such a joy, Nedda was content and did not think of returning to secretarial work.

Then one day *monsieur* summoned her to his private office. She went curiously. She found him pacing nervously up and down, fingering his minute mustache at one step and smoothing his black gleaming hair the next.

"*Monsieur!*" she said a bit timidly. "You sent for me?"

He approached quite close to her, stood a moment scowling into her face, and suddenly groaned, "*Dieu!*" and caught her in his arms.

It was so unexpected that she did not even struggle, but when he tried to kiss her, she turned her face away.

"*Non?*" he said persuasively.

For answer she drew away.

"M. DuGarde," she said severely, "I never expected this from you. I considered you an honorable gentleman—"

"*Mademoiselle!*" he interrupted, frantically. "I beg you to believe my

intentions are honorable. So long I have wished to do that—to hold you in my arms. I could not restrain myself. I apologize. I ask you humbly to be my wife."

"Why, *monsieur!*" she stammered, hardly believing her ears.

He had been very kind to her all along, but there had been no suggestion of any personal interest, so this proposal came as a complete surprise.

"Do not answer now!" he cried impetuously, seeing her hesitation. "Consider my feelings: I cherish you as my most dear possession. You are so lovely—so divine in body and soul. I yearn to have you for my own."

"But—I do not love you," she told him gently.

"*Bien,*" he replied undaunted, "I will make you love me. I give you a beautiful home. I buy things for you. You have only to ask for what you want. And I will be a kind lover. Think of all these things much before you decide."

IF Nedda had given her answer then she would have said "no." But as she thought it over, her first inclination to be amused gave way to a serious consideration of the prospect.

After all, why not? She did not love him, but she never expected to love again. Since she could not have Paul, why not accept what M. DuGarde could offer: security, a comfortable position in life, perhaps the devotion he promised, and anyway a relief from loneliness?

All the next day this problem was in her thoughts while she paced across the little stage and down through the show room for the distinguished clientele.

After lunch she was asked to put on the latest *Patou* importation. At the door to the stage she paused to peek out and see if her audience was prepared to give her their attention. Nothing less than undivided interest would satisfy her for her favorite frocks, and this was one of them.

Her eyes sought the group of chairs where the customers would be seated with M. DuGarde or his chief assistant hovering about them. There sat a girl and a man. The man was turned so that she could not see his face, but the girl was looking toward the stage and Nedda had a good view of her lovely regular features.

"I've seen that girl before," she said to herself, and searched her memory. Perhaps she was just some society girl whose face was familiar to every one.

As she was trying to recall the association, the girl's escort turned slowly about.

Nedda's heart gave a wild leap and then seemed almost to stop beating! A thumping deafened her ears, and the atmosphere became suffocating. It was Paul! She knew then where she had seen the girl before—it was his "one and only girl"—Virginia.

She clutched the curtain for support while she gazed at his dear face. He looked paler and thinner than when they were in the jungle together, and there was a slight scar across his jaw. She shuddered at the scene that recalled, and clung to the curtain more tightly lest she give way to the weakness which assailed her.

They were all looking expectantly at the stage now, waiting to see the *Patou* model. And Nedda could not go on! No, she could not face Paul now—not while he sat there so contentedly with that girl. The ache, which had been suppressed a bit of late, returned with redoubled intensity. She loved him with every atom of her being—and had to see him possessed by another girl.

The room began to swim around her. Dimly she saw M. DuGarde come nervously up on the stage to see what caused the delay. As he reached the curtain and pushed it aside, she took a dizzy step backward.

"I feel faint," she gasped.

Directly his arm was about her in anxious support.

"You shall go at once home to bed," he said, concern sharpening his tone. "And to-morrow you shall not come to the shop—you shall rest."

He led her off to her dressing room; and she never knew who showed the *Patou* frock to Paul.

The next morning a huge bouquet of chrysanthemums arrived with her employer's card. It was the first time he had ever used his given name only, and it reminded her of the necessity of deciding what she would reply to his proposal. He was a dear, she thought, and would do everything in his power to make her happy. Perhaps if she devoted herself to him, she could in time forget her craving for Paul—or at least dull its keen edge.

In desperation she decided to accept Georges DuGarde. At least that would end this insufferable loneliness. And if she found that she had but jumped from the frying pan into the fire—perhaps then she would die.

When she told Georges that her answer was "yes" she begged him to agree to a long engagement.

"I must get used to the idea," she said. "I must get very well acquainted with you. As it is I feel as though you were almost a stranger."

He assented readily. He was so overjoyed that he would have agreed to any terms she offered.

"I will make you love me," he repeated many times, as if to convince himself as well as her.

When he begged her to give up her work, she refused firmly.

"I want to continue to support myself," she insisted, "until I am married. Then it will be time enough to take advantage of your generosity."

But he managed to pay for most of her lunches and dinners by the simple expedient of inviting her to go out with him. Since they were engaged she could not very well refuse. Not that she wanted to, for it relieved her loneliness and took her thoughts from her suffering. Besides Georges was so patient with her and so courteous that she could not help liking him.

"See!" he would say with an engaging smile. "Already you begin to care a little, *n'est-ce-que-pas?*"

And she would nod agreeably, all the time thinking to herself how different this was from the way she cared for Paul. She liked Georges as a good friend for whom one would do much—but Paul! Ah! Paul was the beloved for whom one would do everything! With these thoughts her eyes would mist and she would blink bravely, trying to smile.

"Ah! Now you are sad," Georges would observe miserably. "Now you are thinking of that camera fellow."

She had told him a good deal about Paul, thinking it was only fair. But she had not been able to tell him that it was Paul in his shop the day she nearly fainted.

ONE evening Georges had to leave her after dinner to attend an importers' meeting. Rather than go home to sit alone and brood about Paul, Nedda slipped into a vaudeville theater.

There was the usual program of strong men, trapeze performers, jugglers, dancers. Then the curtain

closed to prepare for the moving picture. She waited with listless curiosity to see what it would be, as she had not noticed the announcement outside.

Instead of the lights going out, the curtain opened again and a man stepped out on the stage in front of the screen—a man with dark curly hair, and a slight scar across his jaw.

Her eyes nearly popped out of her head. She gasped, "Paul!"

She sat rapt while he told about some of his experiences—*their* experiences. He passed lightly over his narrow escape, though he credited his "Young Pal" with saving his life! Tears sprang to her eyes at that, but she brushed them fiercely aside, because she did not want to lose sight of him for even an instant. She feasted her eyes upon him, noting all his dear expressions; and she listened tensely for every tone of his loved voice.

When he stepped back and the lights went down she felt a throb of dejection; it was as if the light of her life had gone out. But she watched the screen intently, and as the familiar scenes passed before her the sobs were hard to restrain.

There came the ostriches—those funny, silly creatures! Nedda, looking through burning eyes, suddenly laughed—it was better to laugh than to cry, and she was close to hysteria. The tinkling sound rang out clearly in that quiet place.

It was taken up by the audience, and a succession of laughs and chuckles blended into a roar that swept the theater.

But almost as abruptly as it had commenced, it ceased. For the lights had gone on, and Paul Rombard was standing at the edge of the stage, hand upraised for silence. His calm had gone. He stood looking excitedly about while the color flooded his face.

Nedda slid down into her seat with an impulse to hide, while every one else stared expectantly at Paul.

"Ned!" he called clearly, vibrantly, into that sea of faces. "I heard you laugh!"

He waited as if for a response, but Nedda kept quiet behind the broad shoulders of the man in front of her. A stir passed through the audience at this impromptu addition to the program.

After a pause Paul continued:

"I have looked all over for you, Young Pal." He seemed unembarrassed by the interested crowd. "Don't disappoint me now. Stand up and let me see you."

Again he waited, his eyes flashing over the audience searchingly, while Nedda sat too weak to move.

"I want you to know that I love you!" he cried, his eyes shining. "Stand up, Ned."

As Nedda sat trembling from head to foot, stunned by that declaration, "I love you, Ned," a man in the balcony took up Paul's plea calling loudly, "Stand up, Ned." In a moment the whole gathering had caught the spirit of it and was shouting as one voice, "Stand up, Ned!"

While Nedda's dazed brain was mulling "He said he loves me—that's what he said—but how about Virginia?" her feet moved restlessly as if they wanted to force her up but lacked the strength.

Paul held out his hands imploringly. As he did so the man in front of Nedda shifted his position and Paul looked right into her eyes. The intensity of his gaze drew her to her feet. She stood wavering a moment, then scrambled out to the aisle and started run-

ning forward, while he sprang over the footlights and dashed to meet her.

They met halfway, fell into each other's arms and clung, while cheer after cheer rose and echoed in the auditorium.

"My beloved!" Paul exulted into her bewildered ear. Then he said, "Gosh! Let's get out of this," as if realizing for the first time the sensation he had created.

Picking her up in his strong arms he leaped up the steps onto the stage and out of sight of the audience, which burst into tumultuous applause thrilled by the genuine romance they had witnessed.

CLINGING together on the divan in Nedda's little room, they bared their hearts to each other.

"Ned, how could you leave me like that?" he reproached. "My darling jungle sweetheart! I almost passed out!"

"The doctor said a little shock would not hurt you," she defended.

"Whew!" he whistled. "*Little* shock! Having my jungle sweetheart desert me while I lay helpless and unable to run after her!"

"But how could I know that was the way you felt? You had treated me so coldly that I thought you must despise me."

"Despise you?" he laughed. "Gad! It was all I could do to keep from loving you right then and there. I was having such a fight to control myself that it made me act that way. And I didn't know you liked me, you must remember."

"I was trying so hard not to let you know!" she confessed, lifting his hand to her lips. "Did you fall in love with me the minute you knew I was a girl?"

"I fell in love with you the moment I laid eyes on you," he declared. "Why else would I have taken a young delicate-looking boy into the jungle?"

"But you didn't know I was a girl?"

"No. And I couldn't understand myself for being so soft about you! It bothered me a lot! But I must have been subconsciously aware that you were feminine!"

"How about Virginia—the girl of the picture?" she asked at last, fearful lest it raise a barrier and spoil all the promised happiness.

His whole-souled grin sprang into being. "Little silly!" he scolded. "If I'd known all your imaginings—that picture was my sister!"

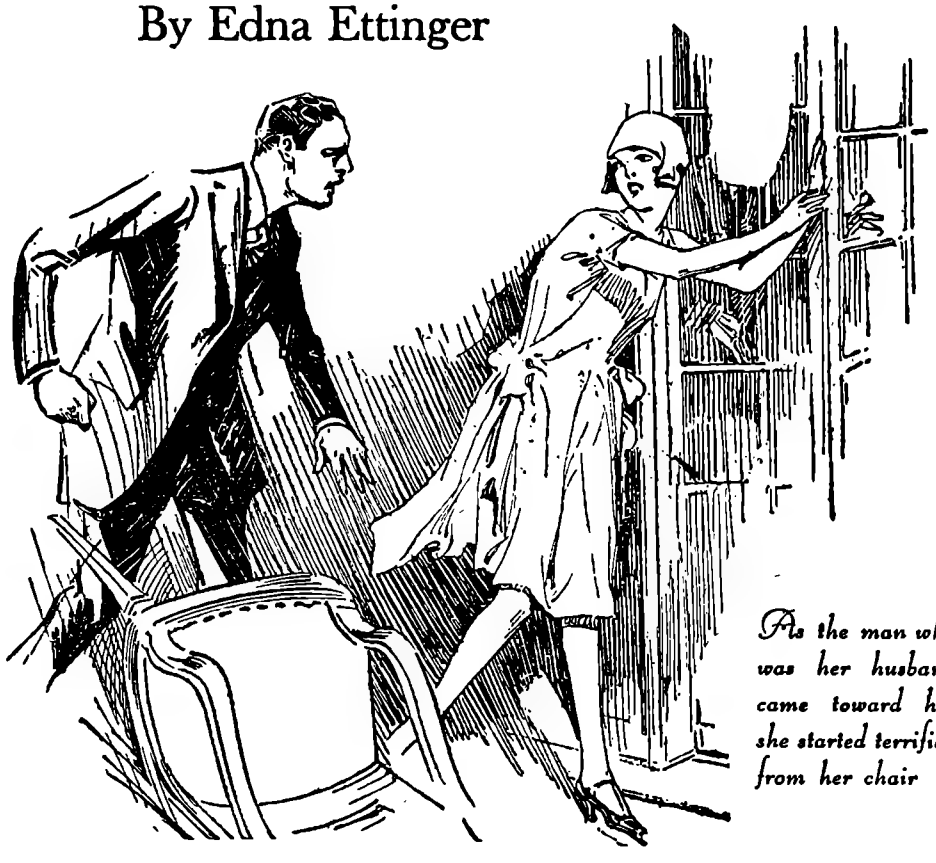
"But you kept calling for Virginia when you were sick, and you said over and over you loved her!"

"*You* are *my* Virginia," he explained softly. "Because I am named *Paul,* and we were in the woods together. I thought of you as Virginia. We were Paul and Virginia all over again. You see I did not know your real name."

She threw her arms around his neck and drew his head toward her until their lips met. Her last worry had flown, he was hers—all hers—and she was his. Forever more they would be Paul and Virginia—together.

Spectre from the Past

By Edna Ettinger



As the man who was her husband came toward her she started terrified from her chair

On the eve of marriage to her rich and beloved lover, the man she had hastily and tragically married long ago appears to threaten her loved ones! Must happiness be forfeit?

SEATED in the luxurious depths of her sweetheart's limousine, Marilyn Gardner gazed out of the window at the pedestrians as she rode down Fifth Avenue. It hadn't been so very long ago that she had been one of them. It hadn't been so very long ago that life had been a bitter struggle for her. But now, as if touched by a magic wand, life had assumed the glorious colors of the rainbow. She was happily in love with

Norman Farrell, scion of a rich and distinguished family. Ten days more and she would be his bride.

Suddenly, in a frightened gesture, her hand went to her heart. The blood pounded at her temples and tiny beads of perspiration moistened her brow. For among the pedestrians she had glimpsed for a moment a single face, the recognition of which affected her like a merciless blow!

It was gone now—this terrible specter of the past—but the memory still clung to her. Surely it must be some trick of the imagination, she argued with herself. It couldn't possibly be Lewis Brandon, the man she had married three years ago when she was only seventeen! She had positive proof that he was dead. She had the telegram that had been sent to her by the keeper of the morgue from the mid-Western city.

It must have been some one who resembled him very closely. Some one who had the same dark eyes, the same straight nose, and the same full mouth that curled up so cynically at the corners. Lots of people have doubles, and this pedestrian who had appeared before her must have been Lewis Brandon's double and not Lewis Brandon himself. No doubt if she had seen him at closer range she would have readily recognized the difference between the two.

She tried to dismiss the episode from her mind. Why think of Lewis Brandon now when she was so ecstatically happy? The invitations to her wedding had been sent out more than a week ago. And for the past few months, with the assistance of Norman's sister, Mrs. Nan Powell, she had been buying her trousseau. The honeymoon had been decided upon—a trip around the world. The future was bright and cheerful. Why think of the dark past?

But it persisted, and came back to her now as though it had happened but yesterday. She saw herself again a young girl of seventeen, innocent and unsophisticated. She was an orphan, with an inheritance of eight thousand dollars.

She met Lewis Brandon, who was several years her senior. She was thrilled by his good looks, his fine manners, and his air of worldliness. She thought that she was in love with him, but she was only in love with love. He married her, and she trusted him with her inheritance. They went to a hotel. Before she had even removed her hat and coat, he excused himself on the plea of going down to the lobby to buy some cigarettes. She waited, but he did not return all that night.

The next day she reported it to the police. She felt sure that something must have happened to him. The police promised to investigate. On the third day she received a telegram at the hotel from the keeper of the morgue in a mid-Western city, informing her that Lewis Brandon was dead; that the only thing found in his pockets was the hotel address by which they had identified him.

She never learned what happened to the eight thousand dollars she had given him on their wedding day. She had trusted him with all the money she had, with the exception of a few coins in her bag. He had promised to put it in a bank in his home town, where they were going to live. Thus she was left penniless while he was buried as a public charge.

The only logical way she could explain it to herself was that he had been robbed and killed. But she could never

understand how he came to be in that city which was more than five hundred miles away. Perhaps he had been kidnaped?

In the three years that followed, while she drifted from one position to another, trying to find herself, she forgot all about Lewis Brandon. It was a closed page in her life. It was like a horrid nightmare which becomes fainter and fainter as the days roll by.

Her prettiness turned into rare beauty. Her golden hair was like fine silk. Her deep blue eyes sparkled with an enchanting vivaciousness. And her beautifully curved form radiated health and vitality. She decided to go on the stage to capitalize her charms, and secured a place with a stock company, considering it as good training for the future.

Norman Farrell was in the audience one night and fell in love with her across the footlights. He bribed the doorman to give him an introduction. Marilyn liked him from the very beginning. They became friends, and the friendship soon ripened into love.

Something sweet and tender stirred in Marilyn's heart every time she saw Norman. The touch of his hand made her pulses quicken. The very thought of him sent pleasing sensations through her body. Now for the first time in her life she knew what real love meant; love that was both sweet and painful. Love that was consuming and overpowering. Love that made everything else in the world seem small and insignificant.

THE chauffeur drew up in front of the hotel where Marilyn had made an appointment to meet Nan in the lobby. Much to Marilyn's surprise, her fiancé's sister was waiting for her outside, and came to the car the moment it stopped. The chauffeur opened the door. Nan motioned to Marilyn to remain seated and got in beside her.

"To my home, Henry," Nan said to the chauffeur. Then she turned to Marilyn. "It's very important. We'll have to let the shopping go for another day."

Plainly Nan was nervous. She kept clasping and unclasping her long slender fingers, and despite the rouge on her face she was very pale. To Marilyn she was the image of Norman, with his light brown hair and eager brown eyes. Nan was only twenty-four, but she had been married now for almost six years.

Marilyn waited patiently, but Nan did not speak. Evidently she did not care to have the chauffeur overhear any conversation. It was only when their destination was reached and Marilyn had followed Nan to her rose and gold boudoir that the latter spoke. First she locked the door.

"I'm in serious trouble," Nan began. "And it's driving me mad. I've got to tell some one whom I can trust. You're the only one, Marilyn. Perhaps you can help me?"

Marilyn patted her hand reassuringly. "If I can I surely will. Tell me what it is."

Nan removed her hat and coat and tossed it upon the chaise longue. Then she sat down beside Marilyn.

"It happened last summer," she began. "Dick couldn't get away from his business and I went on my vacation alone—you remember—up in the Adirondacks. Oh," she sighed, "it isn't right for a man to let his wife go away alone. What could I do up there? I got tired of swimming and rowing and tennis and bridge playing. I didn't know what I wanted to do.

"I suppose I should have gone home then. But I didn't. I stayed. A young man arrived—a new guest. He was about my age. Very handsome and romantic looking. His name was Howard Crawford. We played bridge together one night, and after that he always sought me out. He went swimming when I did. In fact he always turned up where I was.

"I was lonesome without Dick, and I just drifted into a companionship with this young man. It made my stay so much pleasanter. It was just a silly, harmless flirtation. I didn't really care for him. I had no idea of continuing the friendship after we returned to the city. He was nice and decent, and told me that he was going back to Texas, where he lived. So I felt that I might never see him again.

"One day we took a walk in the woods. He told me of a story he had read—a love story. He was a marvelous talker. He seemed to have the faculty of dramatizing everything he said. We sat down on the stump of what had once been an enormous tree. He was still telling me the story.

"He explained how the hero took the girl's hand and raised it to his lips, not only explaining verbally, but also enacting the scene. He took my hand and raised it to his lips. I didn't think anything of it at the time, but I remember I did remove my hand.

"He described the love scenes, and before I realized what was happening, he had his arms around me and was kissing me! I struggled to release myself, but he held me tight, with his lips pressed to mine."

Nan took a lace handkerchief from her bag and wiped her lips as if she were trying to wipe out the memory.

"Finally I tore myself from his embrace," she continued, "and told him I never cared to see him again. He laughed at that. It was a horrid laugh, and it made my blood run cold."

"What a despicable cad!" Marilyn said angrily.

"Wait, dear, there's more to the story," Nan continued. "I packed my things and left the resort the very next day. I was very much upset at first, but gradually the incident faded from my mind."

"Did you tell Dick about it?"

"No. How could I? You know Dick. He's frightfully jealous, and he has such peculiar ideas about women. He always believes that it's the woman's fault—that no man would attempt liberties unless he was encouraged. Oh, I wish I had told it to him right then and there!

"About three months ago I received a telephone call from Howard Crawford. The moment he told me his name I hung up the receiver. He called again in a few moments. 'If you won't listen to me,' he said in a threatening voice, 'I'm sure your husband will. He might be interested in seeing some pictures of us two in rather affectionate embrace.'"

MARILYN gasped. Fear for Nan clutched at her heart. She didn't have to be told any further. She understood what it meant. Blackmail!

"You see, dear," Nan said pathetically. "I had to listen to him then. And I had to go up to his apartment to make sure that he wasn't lying. He showed me pictures taken while we sat on that tree stump. There was a picture of him kissing my hand, and there were two more showing him kissing my lips with his arms around me. He must have had a confederate hiding in the bushes with a camera.

"He threatened to show those pictures to Dick unless I gave him money. I was panic stricken. It was too late for me to tell Dick the truth. He'd want to know why I kept silent so long. You know Dick. You know how jealous he is of me. Ready to believe the worst. Oh, I couldn't let those pictures fall into Dick's hands!

"I promised Howard Crawford money. But when I gave him the three hundred dollars he refused to give me the pictures. How could I expect a man of his type to have any honor?

"I've been paying him ever since. Each time he demands more and more. Now I'm at the end of the rope. He wants five thousand dollars. I haven't got it, and I dare not ask Dick for it. What can I do?" Nan raised her hands helplessly. "It's too late to confess. The fact that I paid this blackmail would incriminate me. I'm afraid I'm lost. Howard Crawford will show those pictures to Dick and—"

Nan burst into sobs that shook her whole body; pitiful, heartrending sobs. Marilyn's eyes filled. She clenched her fists and gritted her teeth. What a rotten cur the man was! Shooting was much too good for him.

She put her arms around Nan and tried to comfort her. She loved the older girl as though she were her own sister. Usually rich and distinguished families objected when one of their members fell in love with an actress. But Nan had welcomed Marilyn with open arms.

Marilyn could never forget her kindness. She had always vowed to herself that if ever she had the opportunity she would do something just as fine for Nan. Besides, she knew of the great love Norman bore his only sister. By helping her she would be doing something for him, too. True love expresses itself best in service.

Nan's sobbing subsided. Marilyn wiped her tears and patted her shoulder gently.

"Don't worry, dear," she comforted her. "There must be a way out of this. Let's try to think. We'll forget about the money. It wouldn't do to pay it. Then there'd never be an end to it. We must get the pictures and the negatives from that man."

"I—I've thought of that," Nan said in a shaky voice. "But it's impossible. Once I even thought of holding him up at the point of a gun, but I knew I wouldn't have the courage to see it through. He's a beast, but I couldn't kill him. Besides, it would only make matters worse if it got into the newspapers."

"Where does he keep the pictures?" Marilyn asked.

"In his apartment. But you'd never be able to get in. It's one of those bachelor apartments that are run like fortresses. You've got to be announced over the telephone before they'll take you up in the elevator. And if he doesn't recognize your voice he'll never let them take you up."

Marilyn thought for a moment. "Is he home every night?"

"I don't know. But there's one night I'm sure he's not home. That's Wednesday night—his club night."

"Wednesday night," Marilyn repeated. "It will have to be done on Wednesday night."

Nan grasped her arm. "What are you thinking of doing?" she asked tremulously.

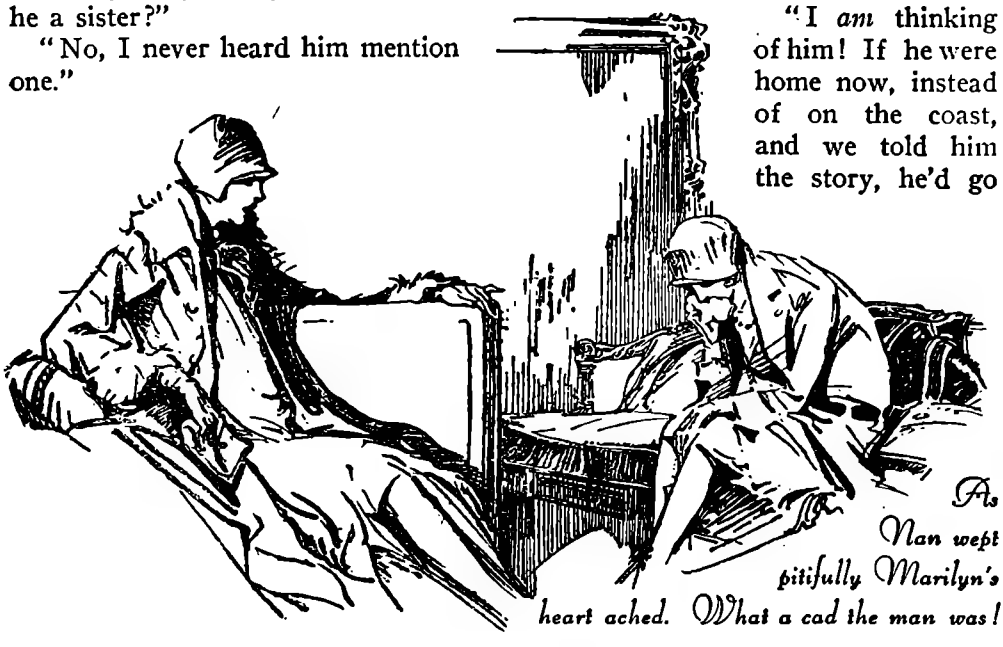
"I'M thinking of fighting fire with fire," Marilyn declared bravely. "In dealing with a blackmailer there is no such thing as honor. I'm

going to get into that apartment, and I'm going to get those photographs!"

"But how will you be able to get in, especially when he's away?" Nan asked hopelessly.

Marilyn's eyes brightened. "Has he a sister?"

"No, I never heard him mention one."



As Nan wept pitifully Marilyn's heart ached. What a cad the man was!

"A mother?" Marilyn asked eagerly.

Nan tried hard to remember. "Yes, he did speak of her once. He said she was a little gray-haired lady. But I don't understand, Marilyn?"

Marilyn jumped up from her chair full of animation. Her eyes shone.

"I have it!" she exclaimed. "I'll go over to his apartment disguised as a little gray-haired lady. I'll be his mother, come to pay him a visit."

"You?" Nan asked incredulously.

"Did you forget that I played in stock?" Marilyn asked. "Besides ingénues, I played gray-haired ladies, too. I'll wager there's a complete costume, wig and all, in my trunk. And I don't think I've forgotten the art of make-up, either."

Nan shook her head vigorously. "But I can't let you do it," she insisted. "Suppose you were caught? You would be arrested for stealing. No, no, Marilyn, you mustn't do it. Think of Norman."

"I *am* thinking of him! If he were home now, instead of on the coast, and we told him the story, he'd go up there and beat Mr. Crawford to a pulp. But we've got to do this ourselves, now. We can't wait until Norman gets back. The damage may be done before that time. We've got to work fast. To-morrow is Wednesday. You call Mr. Crawford and tell him that you'll have the money on Thursday—"

"That's when he insists on having it," Nan interrupted.

"That's fine. I'll get those pictures to-morrow night. I'm going through with it because I love you—and Norman!"

AT ten o'clock on Wednesday evening, disguised as a gray-haired old lady, Marilyn Gardner walked into the bachelor apartment house where Howard Crawford lived.

She wore a costume of black with a long skirt that had been fashionable in a previous decade. A veil covered her face, black cotton gloves were on her hands, and she carried a small traveling bag.

A telephone call to the apartment a few moments before told her that Howard Crawford was at the club, so she went in with a certain assurance.

"I have come to visit my boy," she said to the elevator man. "I'm Howard Crawford's mother."

"I'm glad to meet you, ma'am," the man answered politely. "Mr. Crawford couldn't have known you were coming—"

"Oh, yes he did," Marilyn said, "but he had a very important conference at the club. And I insisted that he keep it. I told him I'd make myself comfortable here until he finished his business. He told me that you'd let me into his apartment to wait for him."

She was taken up to Crawford's apartment and the man opened the door for her.

"This is very kind of you," Marilyn said sweetly. "Howard will be back at twelve, and I'll tell him how good you were to me. I'm sure he'll appreciate it."

"Would you like some ice water, ma'am?"

"No, thank you. I'm a little tired from the trip, so I'll rest a bit."

It was a typical bachelor's apartment, but more than ordinarily luxurious. Marilyn wondered if Howard Crawford made all his money from blackmailing women.

When she heard the elevator door slam shut she snapped the lock on the door and looked around her.

A smile of triumph touched the face that was made up to resemble a pallid old lady. It was a clever disguise. The elevator man had been taken in very easily. Now she could ransack the place at her leisure.

But she had no desire to stay a moment longer than was necessary. Even though Howard Crawford would not return home for several hours.

She went to the secretary, searched every drawer and every pigeonhole. But there was no sign of the pictures. Perhaps he carried them with him? Then her work would be in vain.

However, she refused to be discouraged. She went to his wardrobe and searched the pockets of all his clothes. no luck. There were a trunk and two grips there. The pictures might be in one of them. She opened a grip. Not there. She opened the other grip. Not a sign of the pictures. She opened the trunk—then she stopped dead.

SHE heard the metal clang of the elevator door as it opened on her floor. She dropped the lid of the trunk and listened. Footsteps approached the apartment.

Marilyn shut the closet door and stepped into the parlor. Now there was the sound of some one putting a key into the lock. She dropped into a chair, picked up a magazine and pretended to read.

Her heart pounded like mad. She felt like a trapped animal. What if it was Howard Crawford coming home unexpectedly? How could she explain her presence in his apartment? Her brain worked feverishly.

The door opened. Marilyn could have screamed. Then she experienced a horrid feeling as if some giant hand was squeezing her heart and preventing the blood from circulating. She felt herself sinking and sinking.

The man who entered the apartment

was the same man she had seen through the window of the limousine when she rode on Fifth Avenue!

But now she was certain it was Lewis Brandon! This was no double. This was the man she had married and whom she believed dead!

"Good evening, mother," he greeted her with a cynical smile.

Marilyn's sharp wit came to the rescue. "Did you come to see my boy?" she asked. There was a chance of getting out of this situation yet, if she were able to lie successfully.

"Your boy?" he asked. "Who is your boy?"

"Howard Crawford."

"Indeed. That happens to be my name. And this happens to be my apartment."

Marilyn feigned surprise. "Oh, I'm afraid I've made an error. I spoke to my son, and he was busy at the club, and he told me to ask a policeman to direct me to his apartment."

"And what was the address of the apartment?" Howard asked.

"East Twenty-Second Street, Brooklyn," Marilyn answered quickly.

"This is East Twenty-Second Street, Manhattan. I thought it rather funny when the elevator man called me up at the club to tell me that my mother had arrived safely. My mother has been an invalid for more than ten years."

His voice, his mannerisms, convinced Marilyn that he was Lewis Brandon, even though he had changed his name. She was anxious to get away now, to get away and think. His sudden return to life would change everything. She couldn't marry Norman when her first husband was still living!

"I'm very sorry," she said, as she picked up her bag. "I hope you'll pardon me for intruding." She was congratulating herself on her quick wit.

"Wait a minute!" he said menacingly.

Marilyn noticed that his eyes were on her hands, and it caused her heart to skip a beat. Too late she realized that she was not wearing the black cotton gloves! She had taken them off so she'd be able to search better. And in the excitement of hearing some one coming, she had forgotten to put them on again.

HE snapped the lock on the door. Then he turned to her with cruel, penetrating eyes. "For an old lady," he spoke slowly, "you have very soft and pretty hands."

"Thank you," she said, still pretending. "I hope you're not going to detain me. It's rather late, and my boy may be worried."

He walked over to her, and she felt her whole body shrinking. With a quick movement he pinned her arms to her sides. Then he raised her veil and noticed the make-up on her face.

"A trick!" he muttered. "This is no mistake at all."

She struggled, but he dragged her to the bathroom. With a wet towel he wiped the make-up brutally from her face. She tried to fight him, but she was no match for his strength. Her hat and her gray wig came off. And she stood before him with her golden bobbed head.

"Marilyn!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she nodded proudly. "And you're Lewis Brandon."

"Well, well." He rubbed his hands in a way which caused her to shudder. "This is a pleasant surprise. My darling wife has come back to me. Come—" He took her hand and dragged her to the other room.

"Aren't you going to kiss your husband? Well, well, you've turned into a real beauty."

She sat down in a chair, trembling in every limb. She could not imagine why she had ever thought she loved this man. He reminded her of a cruel, venomous snake. His eyes, as they wandered over her person, were insulting. His mouth was cruel.

"I thought you were dead," she said bitterly. "I received a telegram from a keeper of the morgue who buried you."

He laughed—a taunting laugh. "A slight error." He passed it off as if it were nothing at all. He was almost on the verge of telling her of the cleverness of his scheme. How he had got the keeper of the morgue, a friend of his, to put his card in the pockets of one of the unknown dead, and have him buried under the name of Lewis Brandon. But—it wouldn't do to have Marilyn know too much!

"So I see," she answered. Then her eyes flashed fire. "You're a thief!" she hurled at him. "You married me to steal my money!"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Let's not argue that now, my dear. We must be friends. Aren't we husband and wife?"

"Wife!" she echoed bitterly. "I'll never be your wife. I hate you. I despise you. You're a cad!"

Her words did not even anger him. A derisive smile played about his lips. "Nevertheless," he remarked, "you are very beautiful, and I shall ask you to remain for the evening."

"Never!" she cried.

Nonchalantly he lit a cigarette and blew a cloud of smoke to the ceiling. "As a rule," he said suavely, "people do not disguise themselves unless they intend to do something criminal. What were you after in my apartment? Was it—photographs, perhaps?"

She did not answer.

"It was clever," he admitted, "and you might have been successful if the elevator man hadn't been so anxious to make sure he'd get a good tip that he called me up to tell me what good care he had taken of my supposed mother. Whose photographs did you intend to steal?"

"I won't tell you."

"Why that hostile attitude?" he asked. "Perhaps if you treated me as you should a husband I might give them to you in the morning."

"Will you give them to me now?" she asked eagerly.

"Oh, no."

She looked at him sharply. She wasn't blinded now by him as she had been three years ago. And she knew that deep in his heart he was lying to her.

Even though she might be willing to sacrifice herself and be his wife for the sake of saving Nan, she knew that he would never give her the pictures.

HIS eyes frightened her as he came toward her. She started from her chair, terrified. Then she was in the bedroom and had slammed the door. A key was in the lock and she turned it quickly.

"Open the door!" he roared.

"Never! And if you try to break it down I'll scream for help."

She heard him walk away. But that was no assurance of safety. He might be planning anything. She must get out of the house somehow. She went to the window and opened it. Six stories from the ground! A jump would mean certain death.

Marilyn glanced down the side of the building. About four windows to

the left was a fire escape. But how could she reach it? The ledge was wide enough to stand upon, but could she stretch from one ledge to the other?

It was a desperate chance. One slip meant death. But there seemed to be no alternative. She knew that she was not safe in that room. Lewis Brandon was capable of anything. And since she hated him with every fiber of her being, she preferred death to being his wife.

A pair of scissors lying on the dresser in the bedroom caught her eye. She took them and ruthlessly slashed the long dress she wore, at the knees. Now she would have more freedom.

The girl breathed a prayer as she climbed out on the ledge. Holding fast to the outer frame of the window, she stretched her free hand across the cold bricks until she touched the frame of the next window. Then she stretched one foot across. Upon the next move depended the success or failure of her efforts.

Her face was against the bricks. She must not look down. If she got dizzy she'd be lost. She must put all her strength into her hands while she swung her body from ledge to ledge.

Slowly, now, slowly! Hold tight! You've got to make it! Keep your balance! One foot touched the other. One hand touched the other. Safe! She had made the first one. And if she could make one she could make the others.

It seemed an eternity to Marilyn, but actually a moment later she was on the fire escape.

Hurriedly she ran down the iron steps into the courtyard and out into the street through the basement entrance.

Then she was in a taxi. She'd ask the driver to wait when she got home while she ran up to get the money to pay him.

The taxi stopped in front of her door. Marilyn couldn't believe her own eyes. Norman was standing there!

In spite of her disheveled appearance, he recognized her immediately. Asking no questions, he paid the driver and dismissed him.

THE moment they were alone Norman gathered the girl in his arms and pressed her to his breast. With infinite tenderness he kissed her. Marilyn was in a daze. And when he sank down into a chair and held her on his lap, like a little tired child, she surrendered herself to the safety and comfort of his strong arms. How peaceful it was to be with Norman. How heavenly! What a relief after the horrifying experience she had just been through.

"I couldn't stay away any longer," she heard him whispering softly in her ear. "Of what good is more money if it keeps me away from you? I shouldn't have started out on that trip in the first place. When I reached Kansas City I changed my mind and turned back. Are you glad to see me, my little sweetheart?"

A shudder went through her. She suddenly remembered that she had no right to accept his kisses or lie in his arms. She started to her feet and faced him with pitiful eyes.

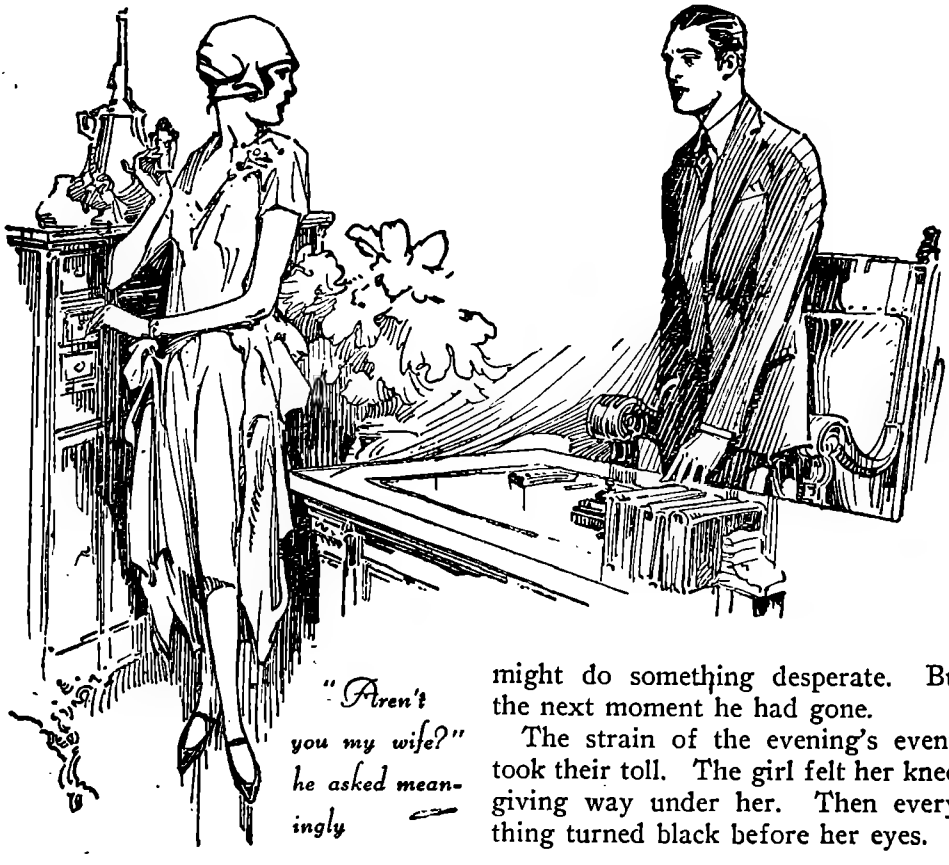
"Norman," she cried, in a voice like a knell, "we can never be married. Lewis Brandon is alive!"

He drew back in his chair as if he had received a crushing blow. He stared at her with unbelieving eyes.

"It can't be. It can't be," he muttered.

"It's the truth," she insisted tensely. "I just came from his apartment."

Norman was tall and broad shouldered, yet he seemed to shrink before her eyes. It was a cruel blow to his love, to his dreams of future happiness.



"Aren't you my wife?" he asked meaningly

Slowly she told him the whole story, of Nan, of her attempt to get the photographs, and of her escape from the apartment.

Her fiancé rose to his feet. His shoulders were thrown back and his fists clenched. His brown eyes blazed like hot coals. Deep anger was stamped on his handsome face.

"There's nothing we can do for ourselves," he told her. "But I will save Nan if I have to break his neck to get those pictures."

Marilyn was afraid to let him leave the house in that terrible mood. He might do something desperate. But the next moment he had gone.

The strain of the evening's events took their toll. The girl felt her knees giving way under her. Then everything turned black before her eyes.

AS in a dream, Marilyn felt some one calling her. Slowly she opened tired eyes. Nan was standing by her bed.

"Quick, get up!" the older girl said excitedly. "You've got to get out of town in a hurry. You must hide somewhere."

"What?" Marilyn asked, failing to comprehend Nan's words.

There was a tap on the door. Nan turned pale. "It's too late," she muttered.

The door opened and Marilyn's

landlady entered. When she saw Marilyn awake she smiled. "Are you feeling better, Miss Gardner?" she asked. "You know you fainted last night, and your young man called me up. After you came out of it I undressed you and put you to bed."

"Thank you," the girl returned gently. "I feel better now."

Nan turned to Marilyn when the woman left. "What did she mean by young man?" she asked.

"She meant Norman. He came home last night."

"He did? Then I think we had better get in touch with him right away. He'll protect you."

"What are you trying to tell me, Nan?"

"Here! Look!" Nan spread the morning paper before her.

Marilyn rubbed her eyes and glanced at the headline:

HOWARD CRAWFORD SHOT IN BACHELOR APARTMENT. WOUND NOT SERIOUS. WILL RECOVER. YOUNG GIRL IS SUSPECTED.

Elevator man recalls taking up old lady who professed to be Howard Crawford's mother. Declares under oath that she never left the house. Gray wig found in the apartment leads police to believe that she was a young girl in disguise.

A sudden chill enveloped Marilyn. Then she felt waves of heat passing through her body. "It was Norman," she muttered. "He threatened to kill him."

Nan grasped her arm excitedly. "What do you mean?"

Marilyn told her everything—of her own unsuccessful attempt to obtain the pictures and of Norman's last words when he left her.

"And I'm the cause of it all," Nan sobbed.

"Listen." Marilyn's eyes brightened. "You get in touch with Norman and tell him to go back to the coast. If the police are looking for me I don't think they'll ever find me."

A little furrow appeared between her brows as she taxed her brain to think clearly. Then, with a swift movement, she threw off the silk covers and stepped out of the bed.

"Where is Howard Crawford now?" she asked, as she began to dress hurriedly.

"In the hospital."

"Good!" Marilyn cried. "Then I'm going to his apartment."

Terror stricken, Nan grasped both her arms. "You will not! I won't let you go. They'll arrest you!"

"No they won't," Marilyn smiled. "I'm going there as his wife! And I'll get those photographs."

"I won't let you," Nan protested. "You have no right to think of me now. You must think of yourself."

Marilyn's eyes were tortured. "My world is over," she said bitterly. "The least I can do is help those I love. Don't worry. I won't be recognized. I even disguised my voice when I spoke to the elevator man."

She dressed quickly but carefully. From her grip she took out her marriage certificate and placed it in her bag. Then she borrowed Nan's wedding ring.

MARILYN found two detectives stationed at the apartment. When she tried to enter they blocked the way.

"I'm Howard Crawford's wife," she explained. "I believe I have a right—"

"Yes?" One of the detectives

raised a bushy eyebrow. "And how do we know you are?"

She made a movement toward her bag, then remembered that the name on her marriage license was Lewis Brandon!

"But I am," she insisted. "If you'll ask him he'll tell you so."

"We don't make identifications over the telephone. What do you want here?"

"I have some personal things I'd like to take."

She smiled at him and the detective weakened. "Well, if you want to go down to the hospital with me and be identified—"

The sick man would never acknowledge her as his wife, knowing full well that her only reason for wanting to get into the apartment was to lay hands on the pictures! And so it was a great surprise to her when he *did* acknowledge her as his wife. She wondered was it because he was trying to keep from the police that he was now living under an assumed name.

Back in the apartment the detective sat down in the parlor and permitted her to go into the closet alone to rummage through the trunk. She felt sure the pictures must be there. If Norman shot Howard, he must have fled. He wouldn't have stayed to hunt for the pictures.

On the very bottom of the trunk, in a large manilla envelope, she found what she wanted! Not only were Nan's photographs there, but a dozen others. Howard Crawford must have been preying on all those women.

But how was she to get rid of those pictures now? If the detectives got hold of them they would use them as clews. And Nan's name would be dragged through the newspapers.

Marilyn borrowed some matches from the detective under the pretense of wanting to smoke. Then returned to the closet. She took the pictures and the negatives from the envelope and placed them in a corner. They caught fire in a devastating flame. Marilyn stepped back. The detective, upon seeing the flash of red, jumped from his chair and ran to the closet. But Marilyn blocked his way by throwing her arms around him, pretending to be frightened. When the detective released himself, he found nothing to stamp upon but a small heap of ashes.

"It's my fault," she apologized. "I tossed the match away and didn't notice the rubbish in the corner."

She picked up a small leather case from the trunk.

"This is what I came for," she said to the detective. "May I take it with me?"

He looked it over and returned it to her. "Sure. That 'll be all right. Where are you living, Mrs. Crawford? We may want to get in touch with you."

Marilyn gave him her address and left.

BACK in her own apartment, Marilyn sank into the armchair and stared blankly at the wall. There was some satisfaction in knowing that she had saved Nan and a number of other women from the clutches of that terrible blackmailer. But what of her own life?

Norman would be lost to her forever. She wondered if Nan had got in touch with him. Perhaps the story in the newspaper was just a blind? Perhaps the police knew that a man had shot Crawford? He might even be arrested now.

A little plan formed itself in her mind. If they accused Norman she

would confess to the killing. What mattered it if she went to prison? She was just a nobody, whereas he was a man of wealth and social position. She loved him so much she would suffer anything for him.

Suddenly the door of her apartment was flung open. On the threshold stood a wild-eyed but beautiful young woman, her breath coming in panting gasps.

She advanced into the room menacingly. Marilyn shrank back.

"You're the girl who was in Howard's apartment," the newcomer began. "The police gave me your address and described you to me. Give me what you took."

"Who are you?" Marilyn asked, striving to appear calm.

"Never mind who I am. Give me what you took."

Thinking that the leather case might perhaps belong to this woman, and since she had no desire to keep it herself, Marilyn took it from the dresser and gave it to her.

The other flung it back with a gesture of scorn. "I want the pictures. The envelope was there, but the pictures were gone."

"The pictures were destroyed," Marilyn told her steadily. "I burned them."

"You're lying to me," the strange girl shrieked. She grasped Marilyn by the throat. "Tell me where they are or I'll choke the truth out of you!"

Marilyn was too paralyzed to scream. She felt herself getting weaker and weaker as the woman's strong fingers tightened.

Then, abruptly, the woman's fingers released their grip and she was torn away. Norman was in the room, and he was pinning the woman's arms to her sides.

Marilyn's hands went to her throat and she breathed heavily. If fate hadn't sent Norman at that moment, the mad woman would have strangled her.

Norman forced the woman into a chair and towered over her threateningly. "What does all this mean?" he demanded.

"That girl stole some pictures from my husband's apartment," the other panted accusingly.

"Your husband?" Marilyn asked in amazement.

"Howard Crawford is my husband. And you went up there, pretending to be his wife, and stole the pictures."

A flash of hope burned in Norman's eyes as he turned to Marilyn. Her eyes reflected the same hope.

"How long have you been married to him?" Norman asked hoarsely.

"Eight years," she answered.

"Can you prove it?"

"Of course I can. I have the marriage license at home. But what right have you to ask me questions? Just give me those pictures and I'll go."

"I haven't the pictures, Norman," Marilyn cried. "I managed to burn them."

MARILYN felt that the woman who claimed Lewis Brandon as husband was telling the truth. Now she understood why he had acknowledged her as his wife! If he had denied it the police would have investigated the matter and found that he had committed bigamy. Who knows? He may have duped many other girls as he had duped her?

"About three years ago," Norman turned to the woman, "your husband married this girl under the name of Lewis Brandon and cheated her out of eight thousand dollars."

"I never got any of that money!"

"No honor among thieves," Norman quoted grimly. "You're both crooks. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if you were the one who took those pictures with which he blackmailed respectable women."

"You can't prove it," cried the beautiful stranger defiantly.

"Wait a minute," said a gruff voice at the door.

Marilyn turned her head and gasped. It was the detective. Had he come to arrest Norman?

The detective walked into the room slowly, with his eyes fixed on the woman. "You told me that you were Howard Crawford's wife, didn't you?"

"Yes," she replied shortly. "We were married eight years ago."

"And how about you, girly?" he asked of Marilyn.

"He married me three years ago, and stole eight thousand dollars—all I had in the world."

"Come on down to headquarters with me," the detective ordered the woman. "I think you are his original wife, and you're both a couple of crooks."

Norman had his arm around Marilyn the instant they were alone. "Do you realize what that means to us, dearest?"

"But what if they arrest you for shooting Crawford?" she asked timidly.

"Why, honey, you didn't think that I did it, did you? I suppose I would have, but I didn't. I came to his house just after he had been shot. I saw a well-dressed woman running away, but I made no effort to stop her. I guess she was a woman who got tired of paying blackmail."

"Oh, Norman!" She threw her arms around his neck. "I'm so happy!"

He held her close, tasting the sweetness of her eager young lips. Then he pressed her head to his breast and breathed the sweet perfume of her golden hair.

"Now we can be married as we had planned," he said happily. "You were never legally married to him. I'll use some influence and we'll have the marriage annulled quickly. My precious little darling, I don't know what would have happened to me if I had lost you!"

Her eyes were wet as she looked up at him. "My dearest, I love you more than life itself. Hold me close, beloved. I'm still afraid that I may lose you."

"You'll never lose me, precious. I'll always be with you—till death!"

Love's Hunger

HONEY of your lips, softly pursed—
The more I sip, the more I thirst!
Sweet wine of kisses that you pour
But multiplies my thirst by four!

R. E. Alexander

He caught her as she fell. What a pretty girl, he thought

She Lied for Love

A trick of fate caused Toni to fall deeply, truly in love with her sister's fiancé!

By Hebe Elsna

ON the last night of the tour Toni Delafield was beset by excitement, and on the next morning when the company, all to disband on their arrival in New York, stood waiting for the train to convey them there, it was obvious to them all that Toni had waked into a vivid life and beauty greater than any she had shown throughout the tour.

Toni's heart was singing "I'm going home—home," and home meant the flat in Chelsea and Jacynth.

Jacynth, five years her senior and a well known actress, held all the love of Toni's heart, that heart which no man had as yet been able to touch. Jacynth meant beauty and tenderness and comradeship; Jacynth meant encouragement; Jacynth meant understanding. And for six long months the sisters had been parted.

Of course Jacynth had been right, Toni admitted, as she sat in the corner of her compartment gazing out upon the flying fields and wooded hills without really seeing them. Jacynth was always trying to instill ambition

into Toni, a quality of which the younger girl did not possess a great deal. Jacynth had pointed out that a provincial tour with a leading part would be really much better for Toni than continuing to play extremely small parts in New York.

"I'll see that nobody forgets you," Jacynth had promised. "And there'll be a decent part waiting for you at the end of the tour, and after all that experience you'll be fit to tackle it. I'll wangle it somehow or other."

And sure enough the wangling had been accomplished, for a week ago Jacynth had written that she was to play the lead in a new play to be produced in a month's time, and Toni was to understudy her and also to play quite a good, individual part.

It would be her chance to make good in New York!

To "make good." As the words crossed Toni's mind she sighed slightly. It wasn't that she was lazy. On the contrary she was active both in body and mind. It wasn't that she didn't want to do something which she vaguely described as "big"—only somehow that big thing wasn't in any way connected with the stage. She just didn't fit in with stage life, for all that she frequently heard it spoken of as the most fascinating profession in the world.

Toni often longed for the thing which most actresses cannot endure, a quiet evening by the fireside with a book, with someone—a very dear someone—sitting in the opposite armchair.

But she never actually visioned the face of this "someone." She had as yet no knowledge of love. She was too dreamy for flirtation, and no one's company had ever meant so much to her as Jacynth's.

Yet already, though Toni was only nineteen, more than one man had felt it would be a gloriously exciting thing to wake this exquisite child to life, for beneath the dreaminess of her eyes there was for those who cared to seek a smoldering fire and passion.

She was olive skinned, with a soft warm color; her eyes were immense black pools of witchery, shaded by long curled lashes; her soft mouth was red and full, her hair a mop of silky curls. She was of average height, and though slim it was the sort of slimness which suggests a tender curved femininity. No wonder then that men thought her lovely.

THE train was a slow one and they had many waits, and Toni filled up the time by writing letters. When the train stopped at a big station, she thought she might as well post the letters. She got up therefore and was about to leave the car when her foot missed the middle step. Toni pitched forward and might have had a nasty fall, had not a man hurrying along the platform, preceded by a porter laden with his suitcases and golf clubs, instinctively caught her in his arms as she fell toward him.

For a moment he held her bodily, and for a moment her fright was such that Toni rested there acquiescent. The man looking down concernedly caught a glimpse of a lovely little dark face, eyes like black velvet. Then Toni stirred and gave a shaken laugh.

"Thank you so much, I'm so sorry."

"Sure you're not hurt?" he asked.

His voice was deep, mellow, infinitely attractive. Toni was very aware of this, very aware of him altogether. A big, massive man, with that peculiar kind of "chunky" ugliness which in nine cases out of ten is more attractive to a woman than actual good looks.

His eyes were fine, however, brown and expressive, and his smile was fascinating.

"It was silly of me," Toni said. "And yet it really wasn't my fault. It was dark in the car. And oh, where are my letters?"

They were scattered on the ground at her feet, and the man stooped for them. Toni said "Thank you," again.

She went back to her carriage, and just for a moment it seemed to her that the stranger hesitated, then without another word he walked off down the corridor in the wake of his porter.

Toni, rather ashamed of herself, nevertheless felt slightly disappointed. In her dreamy reserve she had never, that she could remember, talked with a man without being properly introduced to him.

But now for one fleeting second she had hoped that this particular man would enter her car. And for a second he had wanted to, she knew. That hesitation had been significant. Why had he decided otherwise?

Slightly piqued, Toni took a tiny mirror from her handbag and gazed at herself therein. She could find no fault with her own dark, glowing loveliness, and with a slight shrug she replaced the mirror and taking up a magazine endeavored to engross herself in it.

But it was not easy, and now for once it was not the thought of Jacynth which was occupying her. Somehow she could not get the memory of that strong, interesting face out of her mind. Her thoughts for a while were quite unconscious, and when at last she realized whither they were drifting, she was furious at herself.

"You idiot," she told herself. "If you knew the man, you would probably dislike him. Just because he has a nice smile and voice—that's no reason to think and think about him!"

THE train at last entered Pennsylvania Station, and there like a lovely splash of sunshine in that shadowed place stood Jacynth. Jacynth as fair as Toni was dark, with pale yellow hair, blue eyes and a complexion like delicately tinted china. She wore blue, than which no color suited her better; a soft blue coat edged with pale gray fur; a gray felt hat; a blue choker necklet clasping her long and slender throat; gray suède gloves and shoes. A picture of feminine loveliness.

"You darling," cried Toni in her sister's arms.

They clasped each other, now that they were together, realizing fully how much they had missed each other during their separation.

"Say what you like, Jacynth," Toni said, "I'm not going on tour any more."

"There won't be any need, I think. You've got an awfully good part in this new show—oh, Paul!"

She broke off with a sharp exclamation, the color flooding her cheeks, and held out both her hands.

Toni, wheeling around, saw to her amazement that the man who had been in her thoughts all the journey through was approaching them!

"My dear, surprising thing," Jacynth cried, laughing. "How is it that you are here? I thought you were on the coast."

"So I was," the man admitted. "But my holiday has been cut short. Earlesden wants to start rehearsals earlier than he expected, and there are one or two alterations he wants to make in the play. Needless to say, like all playwrights, I shall oppose them tooth and nail and eventually I suppose give way," and he laughed.

He was still holding Jacynth's hand, smiling at her, but this did not surprise Toni. Jacynth had always been innocently flirtatious; it was as natural to her to caress and be caressed as it was natural for a flower to open its petals beneath the sun's rays, and she could dismiss man, too, so sweetly that it seemed like a benediction.

She dismissed Paul now, almost as soon as she had introduced him to Toni.

"My little sister, both in height and years," she said. "Toni, this is Paul Fleming, author of 'The Chase,' who also plays the leading man's part. He's quite a nice person!"

"I am sure of it," returned Toni, laughing, yet conscious that in the depths of her heart she truly meant it.

His gaze resting on her so intently stirred her, thrilled her. She knew that her heart was beating a shade more quickly, and for the first time she really wondered if Fate had a hand in arranging this meeting. It *was* odd! He was the very first man who on first acquaintance had keenly attracted her, and he might so easily have passed out of her life without a word.

"All right, Paul, we'll see each other to-morrow," Jacynth was saying. "No show, no anything would tempt either Toni or me out of the flat to-night. We haven't had a talk for six months, and so it's likely to be a long one."

Paul Fleming said that he could well believe it, and he put the two pretty sisters into a taxi, which was soon spinning them along to Chelsea, where Jacynth had her apartment.

"Oh, Toni, you do look lovely," Jacynth said. "And it's wonderful to be together again. What do you think of Paul Fleming?" she added, rather irrelevantly.

Toni considered the question.

"He's—very attractive, better than good-looking," she answered.

Jacynth looked pleased.

"That's what I think. He's—he's a dear, Toni. It was he insisted on your getting a part in the show, when I told him I wanted it for you. But then Paul would do anything for me."

There was a personal note in this which vaguely disturbed Toni. Yet, of course it was natural enough. Jacynth was famous and beautiful, and she had always been able to command service.

"All men are like that with you, Jacynth," Toni said.

Jacynth laughed, and the little gesture of her spread hands consigned all other men to oblivion.

"Well, but there is a special reason why Paul should. We—we are going to be married!"

IT was absurd, Toni told herself scornfully, that she should feel a blank sensation as though the bottom had fallen out of her world. Yet for a moment her heart had stopped beating and her very flesh had seemed to stretch and stiffen as she combated the shock of Jacynth's announcement. And then with relief and what she considered returning sanity, she had told herself that of course the shock was because Jacynth was going to be married, because the unity of their sisterhood was to be broken up.

"Oh, darling," Toni said. "I do congratulate you, and oh, I do hope you will be happy."

There was no time for Jacynth to reply, for the taxi stopped and the driver, gripping Toni's luggage, led the way.

Not until they were within the flat alone, and the maid had brought in tea, did Jacynth again refer to her engagement. Then she held out her left hand

and showed Toni the big square cut emerald which adorned it.

"Lovely," said Toni. "Emeralds have always been your favorite, haven't they?"

Something forced in her voice caught Jacynth's attention.

"Toni dear, you're not unhappy about it, are you? It won't make any difference to us. You'll live with us; I told Paul I should insist on that, and he agreed of course."

"Poor boy, what a shame to make him promise such a thing! Why, he would simply hate it, and I wouldn't put him through such an ordeal. But we'll always see a lot of each other of course, Jacynth, always be close to each other. How lucky it is for you that Paul is a playwright. He'll be able to write plays for you, give you parts which will just suit you."

But at this a shade passed over Jacynth's face and she shook her head.

"That's just what he won't do. After the run of this play, 'The Chase,' we shall be married, and I am leaving the stage forever."

"Jacynth! But why?" Toni cried.

Jacynth made a little restless movement.

"I've promised Paul. He—oh, it's a queer story, and I couldn't tell it to any one else—but you see I knew Paul was attracted to me, only he wouldn't tell me so though I gave him loads of opportunities, and gradually I fell in love with him myself. Then one day he kissed me. I knew he loved me then, and I told him I loved him. Then he told me why he had not asked me to marry him, never would ask me. He knew my profession meant a lot to me, and he couldn't tolerate the idea of marrying a girl who would continue on the stage afterward. It seems his mother was an actress and she and Paul's father were most unhappy because of it, and he had a wretched, neglected childhood. Well, when I heard his reason, I said I would make the sacrifice and give up my career when we married."

There was a tiny pause before Toni said:

"You must love him very much to put him first."

Jacynth nodded solemnly.

"Of course I do—Paul is a darling and more attractive than any man I know. All the same—" she broke off with a little restless movement and added: "It's no good thinking of the future, I'm just enjoying the present. I've fixed up all sorts of exciting things for the next week. Of course there will be rehearsals in the daytime, but the evenings are our own. There's a man, by the way, who is awfully keen to meet you. Hector Clyde. He is backing this new show, and he has pots of money—he's not married either, Toni—and he absolutely fell for you when he saw your photograph."

Toni laughed.

"Well, I am not in the least likely to fall for him," she retorted. "I'm not the falling kind."

THE words recurred to her when she was alone in her bedroom that night. Not the "falling" kind. And yet—and yet all day long, even while Jacynth had been talking of the play, of life generally, of everything else in the world except Paul Fleming, his face had yet been eternally before Toni.

It was before her now as she stood looking out of her window upon the quiet square. Deep set eyes, rough hewn features, singularly gentle smile—all that comprised the personality of Paul. And suddenly Toni was shaken

by a sob, and a wave of wild, rebellious longing swept through her. She loved him, she couldn't deny it to herself; she knew nothing about him, nevertheless she had at first sight fallen in love with her sister's fiancé!

THE following week Toni met Hector Clyde. A tall, fair man with a bronzed skin and curiously cynical blue eyes. There had been a party of four occupying a box at a theater—Paul and Jacynth and Toni and an actor rehearsing with them in the new show—and then Jacynth had waved to the tall fair man across the theater and had told Toni who he was, and the next minute he had come up to the box and was being introduced to Toni.

She felt his eyes resting on her like a hot caress, and instinctively she shrank. He was very good-looking, but nevertheless he repelled her.

"So you are the lovely little sister," he said softly. "I have been anxiously looking forward to meeting you."

Toni shrugged.

"Really. I have been in New York for over a week. You could have met me any time during rehearsals."

"Yes, but you see I have been out of town. I had business in Washington, otherwise I should have turned up for your first rehearsal. However, I mean to make up for lost time. This is a poor show, isn't it? Let's go to a night club as soon as it's over. What do you say, Jacynth? How about going to the Grilled Bone? It's about the latest."

"I should love it," said Jacynth promptly.

"And you will dance with me," said Clyde softly to Toni. "I want to get to know you, to discover what goes on behind those black velvet eyes. You are going to let me find out, aren't you?"

"I can't prevent you if you are clever at that sort of thing," said Toni, but she smiled as she spoke, and dropped her voice to a whisper.

She was conscious of Paul's eyes fixed upon her, of a frown between his brows, and something deep within her heart exulted. She did not ask herself why Jacynth's fiancé should be disturbed because she was showing herself interested in another man—neither did she ask herself why this fact should please her!

But she was additionally sweet to Clyde, and he was obviously delighted with her. He attached himself to her after the fall of the curtain, and at the Grilled Bone Club they danced together.

Hector Clyde was a divine dancer, and once they were gliding to the strains of a thoroughly competent band, Toni forgot all else but this rhythmic movement, this sense of floating in space.

Hector murmured very close to her ear:

"You're the loveliest thing and the most exquisite dancer. This is pretty good, isn't it?"

She gave him a flashing smile.

"Yes, pretty good."

His arms gathered about her.

"Toni, you sweet thing. I don't believe I was ever properly alive until this moment. There isn't a girl in the world so beautiful, so alluring."

"How many girls have heard that?" she asked, head thrown back, a teasing smile curving her mouth.

He shrugged.

"You know well enough that this is different. I've a few sweethearts of course; what man hasn't? But this between us is something which is going

to last. Toni, tell me you are going to be friends, going to care for me a little."

"I couldn't possibly say that so soon," she laughed. "But if good dancing would make us friends, we couldn't help but be."

THE music stopped before Clyde could answer, and on the instant Toni found Paul at her side. His face was whiter than usual and a little thrill of elation seized her.

"It's time some one else had a chance, Toni," he said. "Won't you dance this with me?"

"Why, of course," she flashed Clyde a laughing glance and gave herself up to Paul's arms.

A thrill of sheer ecstasy shot through her as she felt him so near. Oh, the magnetism, the mingled strength and tenderness of his clasp! They might have been alone in the world, for no one was noticing them. Jacynth had found a party of friends and had joined them at one of the small tables.

"Toni," Paul said when they had circled the room once, "I must warn you not to get too friendly with Clyde. His reputation isn't—good."

Toni raised her brows.

"Really! But don't you think I can look after myself?"

He smiled.

"Pretty girls can never really look after themselves. You're going to be my little sister, you know. It 'll be one of my jobs to keep an eye on you."

Toni's ripple of laughter sounded a trifle unreal.

"You'll need awfully good eyesight, Paul."

His clasp tightened around her.

"Are you going to make it so hard for me? Nobody could stand by and see you encouraging a cad like Clyde without trying to interfere. You are too sweet, too lovely to waste yourself on him."

"Jacynth rather commended him to me," Toni managed to say, though her heart was beating fast and she longed madly to tell him that there was nothing in the world she wouldn't do to please him.

"Jacynth doesn't understand," he said. "She doesn't know what Clyde is."

"She is dancing with him now, anyway," said Toni. "You'd better look after her, Paul, and not worry about me. I'm awfully tired. I think I'll go home."

"We'll all go," said Paul eagerly. "I know Jacynth will be willing. Rehearsing like this, we ought out of sheer common sense to keep fairly reasonable hours."

They stepped from the throng of the dancers, waiting for the music to stop before they signalled Jacynth, who, in Hector Clyde's arms, was moving toward them.

Toni's eyes were fixed on a wildly dancing pair, a girl and a man who had evidently had too much champagne.

"Those two will do some mischief in a minute," Toni said, and then with a cry caught Paul's arm, for as she spoke the two dancers cannoned violently into Jacynth and Clyde. There was a momentary scrimmage, a tangle, all four were on the ground. There were shrieks of laughter, but almost immediately the laughter was stilled, for it was seen that Jacynth was on the floor. She lay there unconscious.

Paul rushed toward her, but Hector Clyde gathered the girl in his arms and bore her off the dancing floor.

"Her foot is hurt, I'm afraid," he said in answer to Toni's anxious ques-

tioning. "It was when she tried to get up that she fainted. Better get her home, Fleming, and call a doctor."

HECTOR CLYDE took Toni home in his car, Paul having preceded them in a taxi with Jacynth still unconscious. Toni was white and agitated; there were tears in her eyes.

It was Clyde's opportunity, and he would not have been the man he was, if he had not taken advantage of it. He put his arm around her consolingly.

"It's all right, dear little girl. Your sister is not seriously hurt, I'm sure of it. Oh, Toni—my sweet—there's nothing in the world I wouldn't do for you, and I can do a great deal, you know. I'll see you are starred in a show of your own, I'll give you everything in the world you can possibly wish for, only—love me a little."

His lips were on hers in a fierce caress, his arms were straining her to him with unmerciful strength. For a moment, stunned, she rested quiescent, then she struggled furiously.

"You b e a s t...let me go...how dare you!"

"Dare, what wouldn't a man dare for the sweetness of your lips, for the chance to press your adorable body close like this? You witch, don't blame me because you have maddened me—"

He broke off with a startled cry, for Toni had ducked her head and her small even teeth had bitten deep into his hand.

He released her, and she strained back from him panting.

"If you ever try to touch me again, I'll kill you!" she cried, from between her clenched teeth. "I loathe you."

Clyde nursed his bleeding hand in silence. He smiled at her grimly.

"You say that now, my dear," he said. "But mark my words, the time will come when you will change your mind. You will realize that I can do a great deal for you, give you your heart's desire. Then you will be reasonable, and I...well, I shall forgive this," and he touched the mark on his hand where her teeth had met.

Toni scarcely heard him, for the imperturbable chauffeur had stopped the car, and she sprang out, ignoring him, bent only on finding if Jacynth had recovered.

HALF an hour later the doctor had come and gone. J a c y n t h, glancing from Clyde to Toni as they stood by her side where she lay on the divan, said with a brave but difficult smile:

"A badly sprained ankle, and a month at least before I can walk properly again. Oh, Toni...that means you'll have to go on in my place, you'll have to play the lead! But—you'll make good, dear, I know it; you'll play with Paul, and he will help you, won't you, Paul?"

There was an instant's silence. Toni could not, would not meet Paul's eyes. To be the girl he loved, even though it were only on the stage! The thought held a thrill, part of delight, part of fear.

Then she heard him say:

"Yes, Jacynth, I'll help all I can, of course."

THE rehearsal was not going too well. Toni knew it, felt it. In her love scenes with Paul she felt supremely self-conscious. She could not achieve ease, though they went over their part again and again. It was no surprise to her when he said:

"Carstairs is just going to dismiss rehearsal. Will you stay behind after-

ward, Toni, and let's go through it again? I think that way we might find it easier."

Toni nodded.

"Yes, I'll stay," she agreed.

The theater seemed as dim, as awesome as a cathedral when later they were alone on the stage together. She made a supreme effort to throw herself into her part. To-morrow was the first night, and although she was word perfect, there was so much in the part which eluded her. She must forget that she was Toni Delafield; she must be *Claire,* think as *Claire,* feel as *Claire.*

The love scene was tense, impassioned. It thrilled Toni; presently she began to get a grip on it. And it *was* different now they were alone together. She could give herself up to it, abandon her reserve.

"You'll give up this other man," Paul as the hero was saying. "He's your husband in name only, and though you may owe him gratitude, you owe me more. You owe me your body and your soul, for you are my lover, as I am yours."

Falteringly Toni hung back, repeating the words of her part:

"Oh, it's all so difficult, so impossible."

"Nothing is impossible in love," came the answer. "Oh, child, don't you see, that's the greatest thing in the world! I adore you, Toni—my Toni!"

Arms gripping her vicelike, a torrent of kisses falling upon her resistless lips, and her brain whirling, for he had called her Toni, her own name.

This was not acting, it was real!

Then breaking in upon that mad embrace, those wild endearments, a voice from the stage box:

"Excellent, most realistic—upon my word, Fleming, that scene will go with *éclat!*"

They broke apart.

Beads of perspiration were upon Paul's forehead. Toni was trembling so that she could scarcely stand.

Hector Clyde leaned over the rail of the stage box and smiled at them both.

"It was great," he said. "I thought I'd just stay on unknown to you, to see what you made of that scene. Well, you certainly got it across, but Toni looks quite exhausted. What about lunch at the Astor, little lady?"

With a supreme effort Toni pulled herself together. She did not glance at Paul, but she smiled at Clyde, though it was the first time they had met since their scene in the taxi.

"I should love it," she said.

"Toni!"

She heard Paul breathe the word like a prayer, but she ignored him.

"My car's outside," Clyde told her. "I'm ready now if you are—"

"Just wait while I put on my hat."

SHE fled to the dressing room. Pulling down her chic felt hat over her dark curls, she stared into the mirror as she might have stared at a stranger's face. White as a mask, with smoldering dark eyes. Ashamed, stricken, yet aflame with passion.

Toni almost felt as though she were on the verge of madness. She loved Paul, and she couldn't help it. To stop loving him would be like tearing out her soul, but at least neither he nor Jacynth should ever know it.

As for Paul—she told herself fiercely that he loved Jacynth, of course he loved her. What he felt for her—Toni—was at the most a temporary infatuation, perhaps not even that. The play was emotional, and they had been thrown much together.

If she could hurt Paul in some way, for his own good and Jacynth's—be

cruel to be kind. If she disillusioned him, estranged him, he would soon forget her.

It was what she must do anyway. The thought of deceiving Jacynth or robbing her was intolerable. Jacynth whom she had always loved so much, who had been so eternally good to her. All these thoughts flashed through her mind as she shrugged herself into her coat, drew on her gloves.

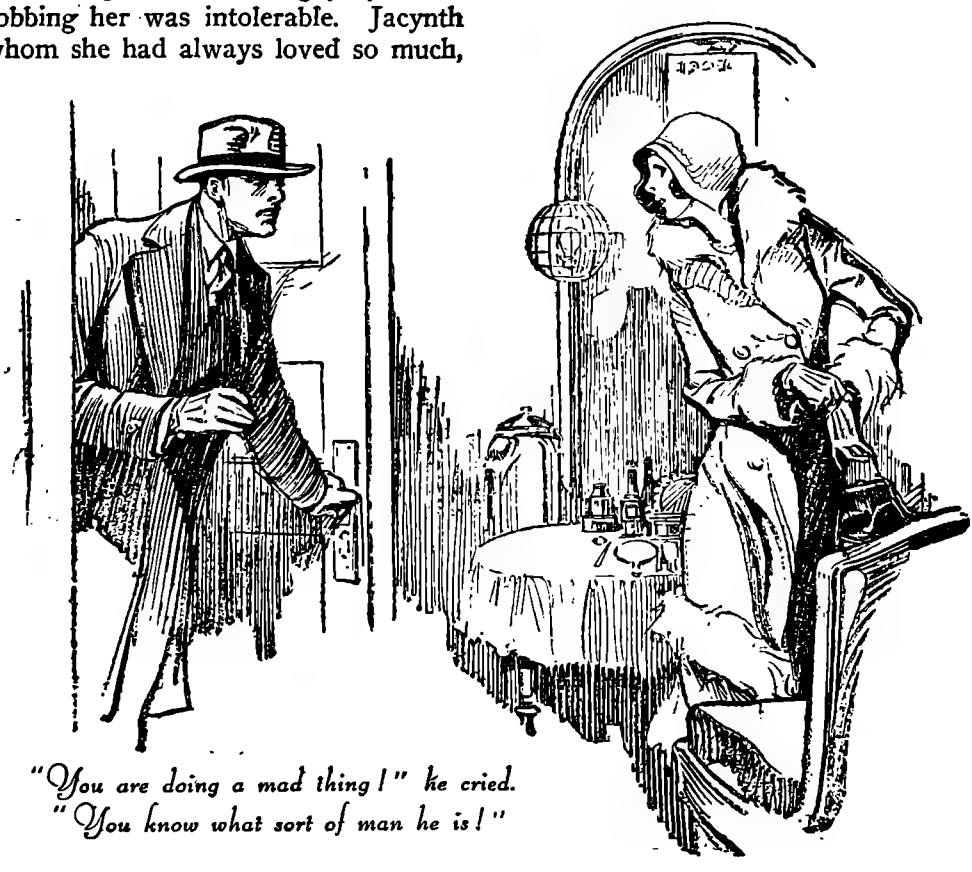
She said "Come in" mechanically when she heard the knock at her door.

Paul entered. He was pale but composed.

"Toni, have you forgotten?" he asked. "We were to lunch at the flat with Jacynth. The Bowens are also to be there."

Toni said:

"I'd forgotten, but tell Jacynth that Hector Clyde asked me to go out with him to lunch. She won't mind, she likes me to have a good time, and I'm all out for that myself."



"You are doing a mad thing!" he cried. "You know what sort of man he is!"

"But, Toni—" Paul said. "I've told you—"

Toni cried:

"Look after Jacynth, she's your business, and I'm not! I'll do my best to make a success of my part, but apart from rehearsals and the show at night, my time is my own, and I'm going to make good use of it! I'm going out with Hector Clyde because he is wealthy and fascinating, because he can give me a good time, because he has a Rolls and can take me everywhere. That's clear, isn't it? Now go away,

my dear Paul, and don't bother about me any more."

But if she had lost her temper, so had he. His hands gripped her shoulders fiercely as he cried:

"You want shaking, Toni! You know you are doing a mad thing. You know the sort of respect a man like Clyde has for a girl—"

"You are speaking of a friend of mine, remember," said Toni, dangerously smooth.

"A friend! He couldn't be a friend, Toni—look here, Jacynth is so proud of you. She has watched over you so carefully all the time you were a kid. Can't you, won't you think of her?"

"I'm not a kid any longer, and Jacynth needn't worry about me. Anyway, Paul, I can't see that it's any affair of yours to interfere. I dislike interference. I'm out for a good time, and I can look after myself."

SHE whirled past him. Paul stood helpless. She had said only the truth when she had reminded him that he had no business to interfere. Jacynth, and Jacynth alone, was his concern.

A pang smote him as he thought of the elder girl's sweetness, her great love for him. A love which had really been responsible for their engagement, for he had never been actually in love with her. Fond of her, yes, as nearly every one who knew her was fond of Jacynth, but that kiss of his which had brought about a crisis had been sheerly casual and affectionate. He had been amazed when he had discovered Jacynth in his arms, clinging to him, her lovely eyes filled with tears.

Then he had told her his resolve never to marry a girl whose career was the stage, and she had showed the quality of her love by telling him that for his love she was prepared to give up all else. Too kindhearted, too flattered and attracted to reject the gift which had been offered him, Paul had drifted into an engagement, and had been content enough until Toni broke upon his sight.

From his first glimpse of that lovely face, the melting beauty of those velvet eyes, he had been stirred, thrilled as Jacynth in her fair sweetness had never thrilled him. He could recall now the pang it had given him to resist entering the car in which she was seated, and then the mingled despair and elation when he had been introduced to her and found that she was Jacynth's sister.

A sigh broke from him. Had she noticed his agitation during the recent rehearsal? He was quite unaware of the fact that he had called her by her own name, but he did know that it had been blissful torture to hold her in his arms, even though it was only a rehearsal of his own play.

Anyhow, if she did guess anything of his state of mind, she had plainly showed that she was indifferent to him. She had shown that she was interested in Hector Clyde and not in him, and what right had he to resent it, or, as she had said, to interfere?

"WHAT do you say to having lunch at my place, instead of the Astor? It would be cosier, don't you think, and we could have a talk. I have quite a lot to discuss with you."

Clyde's voice was soft and persuasive, but Toni hesitated. It was one thing to feel that it was her duty at all costs to disgust and antagonize Paul, so that he turned to Jacynth in relief; it was quite another to put herself in actual danger.

He apparently divined something of her thoughts, for he said:

"Toni, my dear—am I forgiven for the other night? I think I must be, or you wouldn't be here. And if you will come to my place and dine, I will prove to you that you have nothing to fear from me."

She glanced sidelong at the hand which she had bitten.

"If it comes to that, I too have something to be forgiven," she said. "And, well anyway—I'll come."

"You shan't regret it," said Clyde.

Nor did she, for Clyde's evident admiration was balm. It helped her to forget the dull ache in her heart. The lunch was perfect. Afterward Clyde showed her his collection of enamels and miniatures, which were world famous.

As she turned from the case she found him watching her intently.

He said:

"I told you I had one or two things to discuss with you. To begin with, I want to ask your opinion of this play, 'The Chase.' What do you think of it?"

"Why it's awfully clever, isn't it?" At least this was something of which she could speak enthusiastically. "Witty and fearless and emotional."

Clyde said thoughtfully:

"At least Fleming acts his own part in a very emotional manner. That was a most realistic love scene you rehearsed this morning."

Toni's cheeks flamed. The watching man smiled.

"Fleming is in love with you, Toni. Very unfortunate, as he is engaged to your sister. And what about your own feelings in the matter? No, don't get offended"—catching her arm as she would have moved away from him—"I really want to know, because I would do anything to help you, my dear. You know that young man's play won't run a week unless I put up the money—"

Toni stared at him aghast.

"But why not? Why shouldn't it have a long run?"

Clyde shrugged his shoulders.

"How many plays do have long runs nowadays? Very few. Fleming's is quite a clever comedy, but Jacynth, who—forgive me, my dear—is a New York favorite while you are unknown, is out of the cast for a month at least, and unless the show is backed fairly heavily for a month it will fizzle out before Jacynth can go on for the leading part. After that it will probably justify itself and settle down to a fairly decent run."

"AND won't you give it the necessary backing?" Toni said.

Clyde was silent for a moment, then he replied meaningly:

"I'm no fonder of risking a loss of money than other men, Toni, but I'm willing to take this risk on one condition. It depends on you."

"On me? But what can I do?" she asked.

"I want you to give all your spare time to me, not to Fleming," Clyde told her. "I'll see that you enjoy yourself. Oh, I know you are not in love with me, Toni, and I admit I acted foolishly the other night, tried to win you before you were ready to be won. But if you'll give me another chance, I swear I'll not offend again, and I'll see that Fleming's play runs for at least a month."

Toni hesitated for only a second. This suggestion of Clyde's would help her to make the impression she had intended. To go about constantly with him, to talk brazenly, to laugh and

boast of her conquest, surely this would soon succeed in disgusting Paul! And Jacynth—well Jacynth would never know that her happiness had been threatened.

A little breathlessly she said:

"Very well then, it's a bargain. But I—I don't think it's a bit likely that I ever shall fall in love with you, you know."

There was a dark light in Clyde's eyes as he looked at her. Never had he desired a girl more. If all else failed, he told himself that he would even be ready to marry her, though he had little wish to part with his bachelor freedom.

"I'll take the risk. It's a bargain, as you say, and, to seal it, I want you to accept this."

On the table by his side a jeweler's leather case was lying, and now he picked this up, and took from it a bangle, a glittering thing of pearls and diamonds.

"Oh, no, I can't take it," cried Toni involuntarily.

"Nonsense." With a smile at once masterful and possessive Clyde clasped it upon her arm. "It's only a little present, quite unworthy of you, Toni."

She looked down at the glittering stones as though hypnotized. Her impulse was to unclasp the bracelet and fling it back at him, but she refrained. Later she would return the bracelet, but not yet. She must flaunt her trophy before Paul and Jacynth, must make Paul realize that she was the sort of girl who took presents without a qualm.

And so with a sickened feeling at her heart, she nevertheless flashed Clyde a brilliant smile.

"Thank you a million times; it does look beautiful on my arm," she said.

And Clyde, smiling that dark smile of his, refrained only by a supreme effort from sweeping her ruthlessly into his arms. He told himself that already the battle was as good as won. Lovelier than other girls Toni might be, but her nature was much the same.

"OH, Paul, I don't know how to bear it, it makes me so miserable. Toni seems utterly different from the girl she was a few months ago. She always used to take my advice, and really she wasn't a scrap flighty, and now—oh, Paul, you know every one is talking about Hector Clyde and her. She's behaving so wildly. I thought first of all it would be wonderful if they liked each other, such a good match for Toni, you know; but I've heard such beastly things about his reputation—"

Jacynth broke off in distress. There were tears in her blue eyes; her pretty white hands were clasped until they showed white.

"There's nothing too much that could be said about his reputation," Paul averred.

The bitterness in his voice seemed to strike Jacynth.

"Can't you do something, Paul?" she questioned. "I've sometimes thought that Toni might take notice of you, whereas she won't of me. Oh, I can't bear to see her like this!"

Paul turned from the window, where he had been gazing unseeingly down into the street.

"I have spoken to her, and she laughed in my face," he said grimly. "I have no influence with her, my dear. Why should I have, after all?"

"Well, I've often thought that she was fond of you."

"Fond of me!" Paul gave a harsh, unmirthful laugh. "I must say I haven't noticed it. I should say she positively disliked me. No, Jacynth,

dear, I'm sorry, but I am afraid I can do nothing. How's the foot to-day, by the way?"

It was a deliberate determination to change the subject, and Jacynth accepted it.

"I shall be able to go on for the part on Monday. Toni is only too glad. I felt rather miserable about turning her out of her part when she has done so well, but she didn't mind a bit. I'm glad for your sake, darling, that the show is going so well, and glad for my own sake, too. I'm longing to play *Claire*. My last part!"

She ended on a soft note, and Paul said:

"Yes. When the play is taken off we'll be married, Jacynth. I'll try to make you happy, my dear."

She smiled at him.

"Of course I'll be happy." Then, after a pause: "The Crossus Syndicate wrote me the other day, offering me leads in an American tour, playing a season in New York first. Of course I must write and tell them that I am leaving the stage after the run of 'The Chase.'"

Paul murmured an assent in an abstracted voice, and Jacynth felt somewhat resentful. He didn't realize, he never had realized what sacrifices she was making for his sake.

She had told him that his love was dearer than all the fame her successes on the stage could bring to her, and she had meant it. She would marry him and make him happy, and she would never tease him to let her return to her work. All the same, there were times when her heart seemed to wither within her, when she thought of the years ahead in which she would never bow to the applause of an enthusiastic audience, never look round a dressing room heaped with floral tributes, never endure the mingled terror and exultation of a first night.

It wouldn't matter if Paul only loved her enough, appreciated her enough, and of course he would, but still—the New York engagement had been something so long coveted, she felt a pang at giving it up.

HER reverie was dispelled as the door was thrown open and Toni entered. Toni in a new fur coat so expensive and beautiful that Jacynth stared!

"Toni—what a gorgeous squirrel—wherever did you get it?"

But even as she asked the question she knew, and her heart sank. Toni whirled round before her, showing the full beauty of the coat, then loosened it so that they might observe the luxury of its brocaded lining.

"Gorgeous, isn't it?" she said. "It's a birthday present from Hector."

"But it's not your birthday," Jacynth expostulated.

"Well, it is just after Christmas, and the coat was a present in advance. I dare say I'll get a diamond watch bracelet on the actual day."

Jacynth looked acutely distressed.

"Toni—you can't take such expensive presents from Hector Clyde; unless you mean to marry him."

Toni laughed, a hard little laugh.

"Well, it may come to that in time," she said. "Don't glare, Paul, some people still go in for marriage, you know."

"Not men like Clyde," Paul retorted. "You're a little fool, Toni, if you imagine for one moment that marriage is in his scheme of things. He is buying you with diamond bracelets and fur wraps; he'd rather buy you that way than with a wedding ring."

"So that's your opinion, is it?" said

Toni, her face set in a hard, unsmiling mask.

"It is, and you know that what I say is true. But perhaps you don't care; perhaps you're willing to give yourself for a price."

"Paul!" cried Jacynth.

Toni turned to her with an airy little gesture.

"Don't be shocked, Jacynth," she said. "A little plain speaking does no harm. Suppose he's right—what of it?"

Jacynth rose and crossed the room to her sister, walking slowly because she was not yet quite sure of her ankle.

"Darling, this isn't you," she said. "You can't have changed so much in such a little time."

"Stop preaching, Jacynth, and let me go my own way. A girl's only young once. Hector is giving a little supper party to-night. Margery Allis and another man are coming. It's to be at his Shepperton cottage. I'm going to have the time of my life. You needn't wait up for me. I have a key."

She ran out of the room, but just as the door closed upon her Paul caught a glimpse of her face, saw that it had oddly altered, all the gayety gone, tired, strained, set in a sort of dull despair.

A curious feeling swept over him. It was as though he had been given the clew to the puzzle, a clew which yet did not at the moment convey anything to him. Jacynth had started to cry, and feeling mechanical and unreal, almost like one in a trance, he put his arm round her to comfort her.

IT was the last time that Toni would play the part of *Claire*. She had done quite well in it, though she had not won columns of praise in the newspapers. Jacynth was to resume the part on the morrow, and she was in the theater that evening.

Toni did not mind giving up the part at all; on the contrary, she felt that it would be a relief. Just lately it had been sheer torture to play the rôle of the girl Paul loved, to be held in his arms on the stage, to utter impassioned love words.

She had succeeded in her plan. Paul was now thoroughly disgusted and disillusioned, she felt sure that his budding love for her had been destroyed. In three months' time probably he and Jacynth would be married, and he would forget then, if he had not already forgotten, that he had once been strongly attracted by Jacynth's reprobate sister.

Toni sighed. Her own problems would have to be faced meanwhile. Despite Paul's warning, she believed that Hector Clyde would eventually ask her to marry him, and she wondered if she would accept him. Certainly in some ways he could make life wonderful for her. Sooner or later she supposed that he would ask her. Not to-night—there were to be others at the supper party—but some day.

The evening drew to a close, the last curtain was taken, and Toni escaped to her dressing room. She changed, and found Clyde's car waiting for her as usual at the stage door.

Jacynth, feeling unusually depressed, waited for Paul to remove his make-up and then said:

"Let's go on somewhere, Paul—to a club. I daren't dance, of course—wouldn't risk my foot, but it would take me out of myself."

Paul agreed. He too was anxious to avoid quietude and the opportunity for thought. He could not get out of his mind that glimpse of Toni's face. A moment in which a veil seemed to have been torn away.

They had found a table at the club,

and Paul had given his order when Jacynth suddenly caught his arm.

"Look, Paul, there's Margery Allis, and Toni said she was to be at Hector Clyde's supper party. What does it mean, do you think?"

Paul's brow was knit in a frown.

"I'll go over and speak to her. I won't be a moment."

Jacynth watched him exchange a few sentences with Margery Allis, then he came back.

"Jacynth," he said peremptorily, "I'm going down to Shepperton after Toni. Margery never had an invitation from Clyde, didn't know a thing about a supper party! Don't you see—that skunk lied to Toni, so that he should get her down there alone!"

Jacynth stared at him. She had never seen him in such a blazing rage, had never heard such intense feeling in his voice. Toni, of course, was her sister—still—

"Perhaps, Paul," she said slowly, "Toni knew. Perhaps she only just said that to us about Margery being invited."

"I don't believe it! Toni doesn't lie. There's been something wrong lately; she's been playing a part for some reason. You may think it absurd, Jacynth, but I understand her. I'm going down to Shepperton after her, and I'm going to bring her back."

Jacynth rose and drew her wrap about her.

"Yes, of course, dear," she said gently. "I should have asked you to do that. Just put me into a taxi, and then —go after Toni."

He obeyed her. He had no idea that he had betrayed himself, did not guess that Jacynth, entering the flat alone, sank down on the divan and burst into a flood of tears.

Within the last half hour everything had been made plain to her. Paul loved Toni, who, in her turn, loved him. Oh, why hadn't she guessed it before? This, then, was the reason for Toni's recklessness, for Paul's abstraction. Both had been bent on saving her unhappiness, both probably had deceived each other.

"As though I'd accept such a sacrifice," thought Jacynth. "Oh, what an idiot I've been. Oh, Paul, Paul—"

But even through her springing tears, she thought of the New York tour, thought of the stage and her future career as compensations for the loss of Paul's love.

TONI gazed at the elaborately spread table. It was set for four. Though Clyde had asked nobody but Toni, though he had planned to get her alone this evening in his riverside cottage, he was too clever at strategy to antagonize her at the outset by allowing her to suspect that he had deceived her.

"The others will be here shortly," he said. "Take off your wrap, dear. Wearing your bracelet, I see. I love to see you wear the things I've given you, it makes me feel that you are a little bit mine."

Toni smiled faintly. Some day, unless she actually married Clyde, all his gifts would be given back to him. She had accepted them simply that she might flaunt them in Paul's face.

"Isn't that the telephone?" said Clyde. "Wait one moment while I answer it."

He went out into the hall; Toni heard him apparently talking to some one over the wire, and when he came back his manner was apologetic.

"I'm so sorry, Toni, but Margery can't come after all. She has a raging toothache, and of course her friend

will hardly turn up. I only know him slightly, and he is taking her home. But you're not prudish, little girl—you'll stay here and have supper, won't you?"

He sat down beside her on the divan, and slid his arm round her.

Toni said:

"I—I don't know about that, Hector. I think I had better go back. You'll drive me home, won't you?"

"I will presently, of course, but there's no such urgent hurry. Oh, darling, don't be cruel to me—I've been awfully patient, Toni, and I want you so badly. I'm mad about you, darling—you know it—my sweet. Don't be so cruelly cold—"

His arms were about her, his kisses on her lips. Toni sat tense, but when he pulled her to him, savagely close, she pushed him from her, began to struggle frantically.

"Let me go, let me go!"

"Why should I? Toni, be reasonable. I've been very patient and I've done a lot for you. Now I want my reward. You owe it to me to be a little kind."

FOR answer Toni tore herself from him. She sprang to the long French window. As she did so a tall figure appeared without, and in an instant was inside the room.

Toni fell back with a gasp. "Paul!"

"I've come to take you home, Toni. But first I'll deal with this cur, who got you down here under false pretenses. As it happened I met Margery Allis, and she told me that she had never had an invitation here, knew nothing about it. My God, Clyde, I'll make you pay—"

Toni caught his arm.

"Paul! Oh, don't be foolish, I came here of my own free will!"

"And I," said Hector Clyde smoothly, "intended to ask Toni to marry me. It seems that my proposal must have an audience. Toni, I ask you now, will you be my wife?"

But Toni shook her head. Now that the question was actually put, she knew what her answer must be.

"I cannot. You deceived me tonight, but I suppose I deserved that, for I deceived you all along. I never intended to keep your presents. Take them back now, please. I played up to you partly because you promised that if I did the play should run until Jacynth was able to play *Claire*, partly for—for other reasons."

While she spoke she stripped the bracelet and a ring which Clyde had given her from her hand; she took the squirrel coat and laid it over the back of a chair. Then she turned to Paul.

"I'm ready now," she said simply, and he answered as simply, "I have a taxi waiting."

In the kindly darkness of the cab he took her unresisting in his arms.

"Toni, it's no good. I love you. I've got to tell you—this once."

She sighed, as her head lay on his shoulder.

"Yes, Paul—just this once we may tell each other. I knew when I saw you come in through the window that I couldn't pretend any more. I had to let you know I loved you."

"Oh, my darling," he said brokenly.

"But Jacynth must never know," Toni whispered sobbingly. "We must keep it from her, Paul, at any cost. Oh, I couldn't be the one to bring sorrow on her! She loves you terribly, and always all my life she has been so good to me."

"You are right, I know, and I'm very, very fond of Jacynth. But, Toni, it is you I love, better than all the

world and life itself. I knew it from the first."

"So did I," she replied solemnly. "I knew and I was frightened. That's why I encouraged Clyde, partly because he promised to continue backing the play, partly because I wanted to make you hate me."

"As though I ever could! Oh, my darling, my love—"

And with an anguish mingled with bliss, Toni gave herself up to his arms, telling herself that this minute would be something always to remember, something which would be hers for evermore.

IT was in the small hours of the morning that they reached the Chelsea flat.

"Come in and speak to Jacynth, she's sure to be waiting up. And, oh, Paul, play up!" Toni urged.

But the room was empty, though the lights were still on, and sandwiches and drinks had been left on the table.

There was something else on the table too. A letter addressed to Paul in Jacynth's handwriting.

He opened it wonderingly, read through the contents with a strange expression, and then handed it to Toni.

PAUL, DEAR:

I want our engagement to come to an end. I love you dearly, but I've discovered that my art means more. I just can't give up the stage when I marry, and I know you would never be contented unless I did. This New York engagement tempts me horribly, and when the run of "The Chase" is over I shall sign my contract for a long tour. Forgive me, Paul, and try to understand. I've discovered that I am an actress before I am a woman.

The letter dropped from Toni's hand. Radiance overspread her face.

Without a word, she stretched out her arms to Paul, and he clasped her to him.

"I can't believe it—I'm too happy," she choked. "Oh, Paul, I'm glad we were ready to make the sacrifice, and yet I think I'd have died if we really had had to live apart."

"The past is dead," her lover answered. "Ahead is only our great love, my darling. You and I, together for all time!"

And he laid his lips on hers in a gesture of supreme union.

To My Fiance

NO man shall have my picture but the one
Who shall some day have the reality—
The pulsing, living, breathing flesh of me.
No man may have the picture of my lips,
Except the man for whom they wait alone.
No man shall see my quiet pictured eyes
Look into his, except the man who yet
Shall look in them some day and see his own
Face mirrored there. And so I give you here
My picture. Do not make me e'er regret
This gift, or that gift of the future, dear.

—Mary Carolyn Davies.

He climbed the wall and in a moment was beside her. Her unknown lover!

The Phantom Lover

On a balcony in the South American moonlight she gave her heart to her unknown lover. Then evil parted them and made her a cold and unwilling bride

By Ruth Ferris

"YOU may go, now, Maria. I shall not want you any more to-night."

The little native servant bobbed a quaint curtsy and closed the door softly behind her.

Iris Mallory, a regal but dainty figure in her lace flounces, ran across the room to the tall mirror, faced her image there, and laughed aloud for the sheer joy of living. She pinned a red rose in her hair and turned her head this way and that, frankly admiring the effect.

Then there came the sound of a low whistle, like a bird call, from the gar-

den outside. Iris listened for a moment, her eyes in the mirror growing wide and dark with excitement, then, snatching up a lace fan, she ran to the door that gave on the balcony.

The stars paled beside the splendor of the tropical moon, hanging like a golden globe against the dark velvet of the sky. The air was heavily sweet with the fragrance of orange blossoms, and the scarcely stirring breeze brought with it the murmurous strains of a Spanish love song.

Below, in the garden, an acacia tree cast flickering shadows, and among them a darker shadow moved, stretched out longing arms toward the balcony.

Iris seated herself on the wide stone balustrade and looked down, laughing softly.

The dark shadow moved forward.

"*Señorita!* When you appear the stars shrink, and even the light of the moon is dimmed, for you are brighter than a star, and fairer than the moon!"

The half whispering voice that spoke English with a trace of Spanish accent, throbbed with undertones of passion and adoration.

Iris leaned forward, looking down at the dimly seen face, the dark eyes whose glance made her heart beat so quickly.

"Who are you?" she murmured.

"I am your slave; your humble worshiper!"

Iris shook her head impatiently.

"No, no; I mean what is your name? Won't you tell me? Night after night you have come here, talked to me, made—made love to me, yet you will not tell me anything about yourself!"

"I have told you my name."

"Juan! There are a million Juans in South America!"

The man laughed softly, and leaning over, picked up something from the ground.

"You have lost the red rose from your hair," he told her. "Lucky rose, it has touched your cheek. May I have it, *señorita,* to kiss all through the lonely night?"

The longing in his voice touched some chord within her, making her feel a pleasure that was half pain, even while the hot blood mantled her cheeks.

SHE had a sense of unreality, a feeling that this was just a moon dream, a scene that she but imagined. She wanted to connect him with reality, to feel that his part in her life was permanent, substantial.

"Won't you tell me who you are?" she pleaded again.

"I am a fugitive — the hunted quarry, with every man's hand against me," he said at last, and his voice held a note of sadness.

He had never told her as much as this before.

"Juan!" she gasped. "Do you mean that you have done something wrong?"

He laughed, a low, bitter laugh.

"I have done nothing wrong. Unless"—suddenly he was bantering, gay again—"unless I have done wrong in loving you, beautiful one!"

The girl was silent, wondering why this unknown, this man whom she had never seen in the daylight, had the power to stir her blood so strangely. He had made love to her with words alone, yet she longed, with a great inward wondering at herself, for his arms about her, his lips on hers.

"Juan," she said at last, speaking very gently.

"Yes, Rainbow Girl?"

It was his name for her — he had told her that Iris meant "Rainbow."

"Is it—dangerous for you to come here?"

Juan laughed bitterly, recklessly.

"There is a man here in Soledan," he told her, "who would give fifty thousand pesos to see me with my back to a stone wall—and a firing squad in front of me!"

"Oh!" Her voice was sharp with anxiety. "You must not come here, then—you must not run these risks! Oh! What are you doing?"

He was climbing the frail lattice work that reached to the balcony, coming quickly, breathing deeply, his eyes glowing in the half light.

"I am taking more risks!" he laughed lightly. "I would dare anything to be near you, *señorita;* to look into your eyes, to touch—your hand—"

He was beside her on the balustrade, lounging there easily, laughing a little—very close to her.

Iris wanted to draw away, but she could not. The realization of his nearness left her weak—deliciously weak and shaken. His dark eyes, full of love and daring laughter, were staring into hers. He took her hand and raised it to his lips, kissing her soft pink palm and then folding her fingers over the kiss, so that she might keep it forever.

A soft confusion covered her, and she bent her head, not daring to look at him, yet knowing that his lips hovered above, waiting for her to lift her face. And she knew that she would; knew that in another moment his lips would touch her own.

THEN, from the street beyond the garden came the measured tramp of feet!

"Soldiers!" gasped Iris, jerking up her head, staring at him in sudden terror.

"The cue for my departure!" he laughed, kissing her hand again—very quickly this time. "*Adios,* Rainbow Girl. Look for me to-morrow night!"

He clambered down the lattice, melted away in the shadows, vanished utterly and soundlessly like a dream of romance.

For a few moments Iris sat there, listening to the tramp of feet that gradually drew away until all was silent.

Her hand tingled as if it were sending messages to her heart, and she laid it gently against her cheek, while her gray eyes asked questions of the moon. Presently, as the moon vouchsafed no answer, she got up and reëntered the house.

The next morning Iris breakfasted with her father in the cool, flower-scented patio.

Mr. Mallory, a tall man with a face bronzed by years under the tropic sun, looked across at his daughter with eyes as wide and gray as her own.

"We finished the toughest ten miles yesterday!" he told her boyishly, watching her slim, graceful hands pour his coffee. "From now on it's clear sailing into Bogota."

"Congratulations!" laughed Iris. "That railroad means the whole world to you, doesn't it, daddy?"

"The railroad and you are my only loves," he acknowledged. "Not sorry, are you, that you left your Boston finishing school to keep your poor old dad company here in Soledan?"

"Sorry? I should say not! Why, I'm having the time of my life. But daddy, I do wish I could go shopping. Couldn't Maria go with me?"

Mr. Mallory's face sobered.

"No, dear," he said. "Please be

content to stay here until I can find time to visit the shops with you. The streets are not safe for a young woman—especially not for a pretty American girl. You know that it is not long since Valdes became dictator, and the streets are overrun with his soldiers. No, pussy, you stay home quietly until I finish my railroad, and then I'll take you on a grand tour of this whole pocket handkerchief republic."

"All right." Iris gave him a gay smile. "I'll be good. But how much longer will you have to work?"

"Not long. Soon the first train will go through and my big job will be accomplished. I have been afraid all this revolution business would cause trouble, but so far Valdes has not interfered. Well, I have a hard day's work ahead."

He set down his coffee cup and rose, giving Iris's brown hair an affectionate pat. She watched his tall figure as he strode away to join his waiting men.

"Dear old dad," she murmured to herself. "If anything ever happened to that railroad it would just kill him."

Then she spied the smiling face of her little brown maid peeping from the kitchen doorway.

"Come on out, Maria!" she called. "What shall we do to-day, embroider a silk shawl or trim the rosebushes?"

WHEN her father returned from the hills that evening Iris ran to meet him, waving a stiff, official-looking letter.

"Look!" she cried. "A soldier brought it to-day. It's an invitation to a ball—and the dictator sent it!"

Mr. Mallory took the invitation from her hands and read it carefully, while a worried little frown creased his brow.

"We shall have to go," he said at last. "I dare not risk offending Valdes, for he has the future of my railroad in his hands. When is this absurd affair—to-morrow night?"

Iris nodded. "I thought it would be—rather fun," she commented wistfully.

"And so it will, for you, my dear." Her father's face brightened. "No doubt the best families of Soledan will be there, and all the *caballeros* will want to dance with you."

Iris pulled a rose from the bush beside her, and brushed it softly across her lips.

"What sort of a man is the dictator?" she asked slowly.

"Pedro Valdes? Oh, just the usual South American with a taste for leadership, I should say. I do not think he is as well liked as the former president; but he has an army of his own, so he probably does no worrying about whether he is liked or disliked. You will meet him to-morrow night, and can form your own conclusions."

It was the first social function Iris had attended in South America, and all day she was in a fever of impatience.

When at last the colorful scene lay before her, she drew a deep breath of delight. This was as she had dreamed it should be—a real, royal ball.

Then suddenly she found herself being presented to the dictator. She looked curiously at him as he bowed low over her hand. His very straight black hair was plastered close to his head.

Then, as he straightened, and she looked up into his black eyes, a little cold chill went through her. There was something sinister in their expression, even though his lips were parting in a smile, and he was obviously regarding her with admiration.

"I have long wanted to meet the Señorita Mallory," he said in his smooth, oily tones; "ever since I rode past her garden one day and saw her there, the fairest rose among many. Will you dance with me, *señorita?*"

Iris glanced at her father, who nodded slightly, so she smiled gayly at Valdes, striving to conquer her instinctive feeling of repugnance toward him. At the touch of his hand, however, she had again that feeling of coldness, the presentiment of evil.

After the dance she made a light excuse and escaped from him, shivering slightly, glad that she would not have to dance with him again. She ran up a short flight of steps, and found that there was a tiny balcony overlooking the ballroom. She was just about to seat herself there when a figure, half concealed behind a palm, moved slightly.

"I am sorry," murmured Iris, and turned to leave the balcony. But the seated man rose.

"Do not leave me —Rainbow Girl!" he pleaded softly.

The man who was her husband grasped her, his eyes leering, his lips loose and bestial!

Iris whirled in quick amazement. "Juan!" she gasped.

HE took a sudden step forward and seized both her hands, carrying them to his lips.

"How I have longed to see you!" he murmured. "I could not come last night, dear one, and every hour has

been more desolate than the one before. My eyes have ached for the sight of you, my ears have listened in vain for your sweet voice—"

"But, Juan," protested the girl, "you should not have risked coming here. The man who hates you—is he here to-night?"

"He is here. You were dancing with him a moment ago."

"The dictator!"

"Yes."

"Juan, you must leave at once!" There was desperate anxiety in her eyes, and her voice trembled in spite of her efforts to keep it steady. "Why, he is all powerful in Soledan! If he should see you— Oh, please go, dearest; please, please go!"

Before she could protest Juan had seized her in his arms, was holding her there tightly, his eyes blazing into hers.

"You called me dearest!" he whispered. "You love me, then—you love me, Rainbow Girl!"

His lips were on hers, eager, demanding, thrilling her soul with an ecstasy she had never known!

Then there was the sound of a voice on the stairs behind them.

"The dictator!" gasped Iris, in an agony of apprehension.

Without a sound Juan strode to a tiny doorway on the opposite side of the balcony. Turning, he blew her a kiss, then he disappeared.

Iris had just time to seat herself on the bench by the railing when Valdes appeared.

"Ah, *señorita!*" purred Valdes. "I could no longer deprive myself of the intoxication of your presence! One glance from your beautiful eyes is worth a kingdom!"

"Or perhaps—a republic?" murmured Iris. Valdes had seated himself beside her, and the nearness of his heavy body sent a feeling of weakness through her. She felt helpless, inert, as if she were a fluttering bird charmed by the gleam of his black, beady eyes.

"Why do you say that?" he asked quickly, a wary expression replacing his amorous glance.

"Oh, I don't know." Iris shrugged. "Every one knows that Soledan is yours, at your entire command."

"You are right!" he exclaimed. "I am the dictator. Soledan is mine—and all its people are mine, too!"

He looked at her meaningly, and the bold glance of his eyes seemed to scorch her so that Iris shrank from him perceptibly. She had only one desire, to get away from him. Juan must be safe by this time, and far away. She rose, escaped Valdes's detaining hand, and moved quickly toward the stairs.

"I have promised this dance," she murmured vaguely, and ran down the steps, still feeling his eyes upon her.

She found her father in the throng and rushed up to him.

"Daddy!" she whispered. "Please take me home!"

"Why, Iris! Already? What is the matter?"

"Please don't ask me, dear. But we can go now, can't we? We are not obliged to stay any longer?"

"Why, of course, if you wish it."

In a few moments they were in the dimly lighted, peaceful patio, and Iris breathed a sigh of relief. Her father, after one glance at her pale face and haunted eyes, left her alone, and Iris went quietly to her room, where her nervous tension found vent in a burst of tears. At last, worn out, she slept.

LATE in the afternoon of the next day Iris's little native maid burst into the room where Iris sat writing a letter.

"*Señorita!*" she gasped. "The dictator! He is here to call on you!"

"What! Valdes here!" Iris sprang to her feet. "What can he want?"

For a brief, agonizing moment she feared that Valdes had learned of Juan's visits to her; that he had come to demand of her the whereabouts of the fugitive. Then she gave her head an impatient shake. Juan was all right—must be all right. Perhaps Valdes wanted to see her father.

She moved, a cool and dignified figure in her frock of pale green fluttering chiffon, down to the reception hall.

Valdes stood there, tall, imperturbable, his eyes keenly appraising her as she moved toward him.

"Good afternoon, *señor,*" she said unsmilingly. "You wished to see my father, perhaps? He is not here just now."

"No, no!" Valdes gave an impatient wave of his hand. "It is not the Señor Mallory I wish to see, but you, sweet *señorita!*"

He bowed low, with an exaggerated flourish, and Iris inclined her head gravely.

"What can the dictator want with me?" she inquired coldly.

A greedy expression crept into his black eyes as he regarded her.

"*Señorita,* I will state my mission quickly, with no false hesitation. I have come here to ask you to be my wife!"

Iris started back, staring at him in startled amazement.

Dropping his pose of pompous formality, Valdes took a quick stride forward.

"*Señorita,* I am mad about you! You turn my blood to wine—you have captured my heart! Your eyes, your lips, they madden me! I must have you—I will have you!"

He seized her hand and covered it with kisses. His lips were burning, yet their touch sent a cold chill to her heart. He stretched out eager arms and would have caught her in them, but Iris took two quick steps backward, drawing herself up to her full height, and looking at him scornfully.

"Señor Valdes," she said in icy tones. "Please do not touch me. You have asked me to marry you. My answer is no!"

Valdes laughed, showing his white, pointed teeth. "Very clever, *señorita!* The first answer should always be no!" He bowed again, mockingly.

Rage was consuming her, but Iris held herself calm.

"If you should ask me a million times, the answer would always be no!" she cried.

Suddenly Valdes's manner changed.

"How then, if I do not ask—but command!"

Iris looked at him with incredulity in her face.

"You—would command—me?"

"Let us put it this way, sweet *señorita.* We will make a bargain, you and I." He looked at her smilingly, and Iris sensed the cruelty behind the smile. "You become my wife—and I will not destroy the railroad your father has labored on for so many months!"

IRIS stared at him, while the full sense of his words sank into her brain. The railroad — the dream of her father's heart, of his life! If she refused to marry Valdes it would be torn apart rail by rail, the plans of years ruined. It would almost kill her father, make him a bitter, broken old man.

What did her happiness matter against the dream of her father's life-

time? But perhaps there would be some other way out—then she looked into Valdes's face again, and hopelessness assailed her. This man was cruel, ruthless and unscrupulous, and he held Soledan in the palm of his hand. What could she do, how could she resist him? There was no hope but in acquiescence.

And Juan? What would he do when he learned that she was to marry his enemy?

But what was Juan? A fugitive—a vagabond. He could not help her now, could not release her from this terrible "either—or" proposition, of which both alternatives were fearful. Perhaps she would be able to play for time.

She looked at Valdes. He was watching her as the cat watches the mouse it means to devour.

"I—I should like to consider," she faltered. "I will give you my answer to-morrow."

Valdes smiled cruelly. "To-morrow will be too late," he told her. "Already I have sent men with orders to blow up large portions of the tracks. Only a swift runner can overtake them now."

Iris pushed her hair back from her forehead with the palm of her hand, her bewildered, despairing eyes on his face. For a long moment she stared, then she spoke.

"Send the runner," she said hoarsely. "You have won, Señor Valdes. I will marry you."

In her heart she was silently saying good-by to Juan, the lover of her dreams. That part of her life was over now, must be always as a sealed, preciously guarded book.

Valdes smiled, almost licking his lips as he stared at her. At last he bowed low and raised her hand to his lips.

"I go to make arrangements for the wedding," he told her. "It shall be an affair such as Soledan has never seen! Farewell, my bride!"

He would have taken her in his arms, but Iris stepped back quickly, staring at him with such a look of hunted, desperate appeal in her eyes that his hands dropped to his sides, and he laughed shortly. He bowed again and was gone.

Iris scarcely knew how she lived through the time that followed. Her father could not understand why she was marrying Valdes, and she dared not give him an explanation. At last he gave up questioning her, and the plans for the wedding went on.

She had not seen Juan since the night of the ball, and as the days passed it seemed to her that he was only a figment of her imagination. She had just dreamed his surreptitious visits, the love-making that so stirred her pulses.

Valdes insisted that they be married with all the pomp and show befitting the wedding of the country's ruler, even though that country covered only a few hundred square miles, and Iris could do nothing but consent. After all, what did it matter? She was caught in a net, a web of evil, and to dress herself up in white satin and orange blossoms made the net no tighter.

At last the day she dreaded arrived, and never had hours passed so swiftly. She was walking down the church aisle, her long veil dragging behind her. Before her were flickering candles—and the triumphant face of Valdes, watching her, devouring her with his eyes.

As in a dream, she heard a droning voice asking her questions; heard her own voice, thin and quiet, answering,

assenting. Was this Iris Mallory, the care-free girl who had been so happy to visit her father in South America? Was this the girl who had leaned over the balcony rail in the moonlight and let Juan make love to her?

Where was Juan? Was he free? Was he alive? Would he ever know about the dreadful thing that had happened to her?

She saw her lover fighting for his life!

WITHOUT realizing that there had been an interval, Iris found herself traversing the aisle again, treading on roses—white roses. Where was the red rose that had dropped from her hair that night—the rose Juan had taken to kiss all the night through?

People were talking to her, but she scarcely heard them, she only smiled mechanically.

They had left the church, and were now at the home of the dictator. The full length of a long low room stretched a table, burdened and groaning with the wedding feast. There were two high-backed, royal-looking chairs at the head of the table. Iris found herself in one of them, and

turning her head wearily she saw that Valdes occupied the other.

He was leaning forward, saying something to her, laughing, his greedy eyes on her face, but Iris did not seem to see him. She saw only a moonlit garden, heard only a passionate voice saying: "I would dare anything to be near you—to look into your eyes—to touch your hand—"

Only that was real, the scene before her was only a dream. It could not be true that this man beside her was her *husband!* She glanced at him, and then looked away again, sickened.

He was drinking from a golden goblet, his face was flushed to a dark red, his eyes were glittering, greedy, his lips loose and his hand unsteady.

Iris looked around for her father, but could not see him. What had become of him—what had they done to him? Suddenly every one about her seemed a stranger, an alien, and of the man who was her husband she was afraid—so afraid that her flesh was cold.

Even as she was thinking that she could never endure his touch, he was on his feet, lurching unsteadily, leering down at her. With a coarse jest on his lips he leaned over her, seized her, lifted her in his arms.

In vain Iris struggled—even in his drunken condition Valdes was brutally strong. He was carrying her away from the banquet hall—up a flight of stairs—along a corridor— Far behind them, in the room they had left, Iris heard a burst of laughter.

They approached a great door of carved oak, and it swung open before them. Into the huge, luxurious room strode Valdes, with Iris lying, half fainting, in his arms.

She felt herself being lowered to a chair—and suddenly a figure darted in front of her, flung itself into the arms of Valdes.

IRIS stared, wide-eyed. A beautiful Spanish girl was clinging to Valdes, staring up into his face, caressing him, talking to him in pleading, broken tones.

With a look of disgust Valdes flung her from him.

"You were sent to Bogota, Rita," he glowled. "Why did you not stay there?"

The girl jerked back her head, staring at him with glittering, dangerous eyes.

"You sent me away, not for a pleasure trip, but to get rid of me!" she hissed.

"And what if I did?" laughed Valdes scornfully. "You may as well go back to Bogota. The beautiful girl you see here before you is my bride!"

"Your bride!" flamed Rita, turning savagely upon Iris. "She will never be your wife—she will not live that long!"

She snatched a dagger from her waist and rushed upon Iris, but Valdes seized her, flung her to one side. He called a servant and told the man to take Rita away. When that had been accomplished, Valdes turned to Iris.

"I hope you were not frightened, little white dove," he said. "That Rita, she is a bad one. But she will not trouble us any longer. Come, beautiful one!"

He advanced toward her, holding out his arms, but Iris shrank from him. Suddenly everything had become real to her—real and very terrible.

Before Valdes could touch her she jumped up from the chair, darted over to the heavy door and jerked it open. Her veil caught on something, dragging her back, but she gave it one jerk

and fled out through the door, down the corridor toward an open window at the end of it. The window was wide, and looked out on blackness.

Valdes was behind her, she could hear his rushing feet, his hoarse voice. Without an instant's hesitation Iris swung herself to the window sill and leaped out into the darkness.

She landed on soft earth — and a pair of arms were helping her up, a thrilling, vibrant voice was sounding in her ears!

"Rainbow Girl, what has happened? Why are you in the house of the dictator—and why do you leap from a window, falling into my arms like a star?"

He was holding her in his arms, staring down at her. Something choked in her throat, so that she was unable to answer him. Suddenly he noticed her dress.

"You are in white!" he exclaimed. "You wear a veil—orange blossoms—what does this mean?"

"It means," answered Iris, through stiff, agonized lips, "that I am—the bride—of the dictator!"

"What!" Juan forced her back in his arms, staring down into her eyes, such a look of fury on his face that the girl instinctively closed her eyes. "You love Valdes—you are married to him! You were just playing with me, then?"

"No, no, Juan," pleaded Iris. "You don't understand. He forced me to marry him—he swore that if I did not he would destroy my father's railroad. And he loves the railroad, Juan!"

Juan nodded slowly.

"I understand," he said. "But your sacrifice was in vain. The railroad was blown up in several places three hours ago!"

"My father?" she asked breathlessly.

"Your father got word of it, and went to try to stop them. He was hurt—not seriously; do not tremble so, dearest! But the railroad is destroyed."

"Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?" moaned the girl. "I hate Valdes! I would rather die than be his wife. Yet I *am* his wife!"

"Do not fear, dearest one," whispered Juan, his lips against her cheek. "There will be a way. I cannot—"

He stopped abruptly, and loosing her from his arms, whirled so quickly that Iris almost fell to the ground.

Suddenly there were lights, people, all about them, it seemed. Juan was fighting with three burly fellows, fighting as if for his very life. But the odds were too great, and in a moment he was a prisoner.

Valdes stood beside her.

"So I have you at last, De Alarcon!" cried the dictator. There was a cruel, gloating look of triumph on his face. "This is one time you will not escape me! Tie him to that tree, men! Sancho, give me a revolver!"

"No! No!" screamed Iris.

She caught at Valdes's arm, shaking it desperately.

Juan was looking at the dictator with a strange smile on his face.

"Do not be too hasty, Valdes," he said quietly. "Listen!"

He raised his hand, and now Iris, listening with the rest, heard noises that she had only subconsciously noted before. In the street was the sound of many shouting voices, and the tramp of feet. There was much hoarse yelling, and cries of "Down with the dictator!".

As Valdes listened his face slowly whitened. "What does it mean?" he gasped.

"It means—revolution!" cried Juan.

Suddenly Valdes became filled with rage. His face was purple, mottled, and his eyes glared ferociously.

"You have done this!" he cried to Juan in a choking voice.

He raised the revolver that a soldier had handed him, and deliberately pointed it at Juan's heart.

Iris screamed and flung herself forward, but Valdes gave her a violent push to one side, so that she fell to the ground, bruising her hands, tearing the white satin of her wedding gown.

Juan glared at Valdes, but the revolver was raised again, and pointed unwaveringly at him. Iris stretched out her arms to her lover, murmuring his name, and he smiled at her, a calm, brave smile.

"Good-by, Rainbow Girl," he murmured softly.

Valdes gave a short laugh, and his finger began to tighten on the trigger. Then suddenly a figure darted through the group of people, was upon Valdes. Gleaming steel flashed high, and then descended. The form of the dictator suddenly crumpled to the ground like a half emptied bag of meal. The girl Rita began to laugh, a shrill hysterical laugh, then she raised the knife over her own breast.

WITH a little broken cry Iris hid her face in her hands. There was noise and confusion all about her. She was bewildered, confused, stiff with horror at the scene she had just witnessed.

Then there were comforting arms about her, a gentle, loving voice was saying something to her. She felt herself being carried, and she abandoned herself to the delicious security of those strong arms. Finally she was set gently on her feet.

"Iris," whispered Juan gently. "Won't you look at me?"

She opened her eyes, dark pools in her white face.

"Everything is all right now," he whispered. "You can be happy again."

"My father—"

"I see him waiting for you in the patio. And do not let him be unhappy about his railroad. I will see that he has men—money—everything needful to build it even better than before."

"Juan." Iris looked wistfully up into his eyes. "Tell me who you really are!"

"I am Juan de Alarcon. The former President of Soledan was my father. When he was killed, and the dictator set himself up as ruler, I was forced to flee for my life, and remain in hiding. But all the time I was working, planning for a counter revolution. And at last the time was ripe to strike! I was busy night and day, organizing, arming my followers. That was why I could not come to see you; why I knew nothing of your marriage. But my thoughts were always with you, dear one."

The garden was still and quietly fragrant all about them. The moon shone down, just as it had that other night—so long ago it seemed!

"Rainbow Girl," he murmured. "My mother came from Vermont. Would you care to—stay here—be a president's wife?"

His dark eyes were full of longing, and a sweet fire that confused her made her cheeks flush and her heart pound madly.

She whispered one little word, so low that he could hardly hear, but it was the word that can change the world to paradise. Then she lifted her face for his eager, longing kiss, and gave him her love—forever.

Love's Branding Iron

Averil keeps a tryst with—love at last! But over her hangs the shadow of her hated marriage!

By Ethel LeCompte

Author of "Winter in Her Heart," "One Supreme Moment," etc.

WHEN her father is caught "rustling" and is about to be summarily hanged, Averil Beyle takes the only way to save him; she agrees to wed his captor, Slim Hedges, bully and bad man of the neighborhood. The strange ceremony takes place by the light of a single candle, with the tardy bridegroom wearing a bandanna over his face!

He does not speak.

Hedges had promised that he would not claim Averil as his wife until the spring, but the girl learns that he has no intention of keeping his promise and, with her father, hurriedly leaves her ranch home and sets out bravely into the unknown.

CHAPTER V

"WE'RE over the line!" cried Terry Beyle. "We're in Wyoming!"

"And we crossed just at sunset," exclaimed Averil. "That's a good sign, don't you reckon, dad?"

"We need all the good signs we can corral, daughter. I've felt just like a hunted thing for the past three weeks! Even now that devil may locate us if we show ourselves in a town."

"Don't worry, dad! If he wanted to

"Don't you know that you are lovely enough to grace a palace?"

get us, he'd have done it while we were in Montana. We're safe, I'm sure. Now let's take it easier. Even though we've been hurrying so, I've enjoyed our journey; but oh, it would be great to travel slowly and stay awhile in places we like! Shall we camp over in that little clearing for a few days?"

"Might as well," agreed her father. "Ought to be plenty rabbits hereabouts. Fish in that river over there, too."

So for the next two weeks their flight resolved itself into a camping trip.

Despite the hardships of the road, Averil felt happier than she had since her mother died. For one thing, her father was away from temptation, and was more like the merry pal he used to be in the old days. Averil knew that he had a flask, which he filled at the little towns they passed through; but as he limited himself to one or two drinks a day, she said nothing about it. She told herself that he was "tapering off," and that she couldn't blame him for indulging mildly when the flivver had one of its "fainting spells," as she called them.

After they crossed into Wyoming, they sometimes stopped at the whitewashed log cabins along the way. In these lived lonely bachelors, who fed them fried meat, fried potatoes, and sourdough, grumbled about everything, and plied them with questions about their journey.

Sometimes they spent a night at one of the larger houses, homes of prosperous wheat growers or ranchers. Here the stout, ruddy-faced hostess, delighted to have guests, cooked "company" dinners for them, and then asked them more questions than their bachelor hosts had ever done. Averil and her father stuck to their story about being tourists from Minnesota, and got quite used to being Agnes and Jim Bailey.

One morning they found that the road was steadily ascending. The flivver, however, seemed to be in a good mood, and they were just breathing easier, thinking that they would make it to the top of the divide without trouble, when the old car suddenly "fainted."

For two hours both worked on her. Then Beyle, grimy, greasy, and tired, said to his equally grimy, greasy, and tired helper:

"Daughter, this cyar ain't fainted. She's up and died on us. Now if only she was a pair of hosses—"

"She brought us all the way from Montana—excuse me, I mean Minnesota," cut in Averil. "That's more than even Nell and Jupe could have done."

"But she's quit for all time now," Beyle pointed out grimly. "She's left us high and dry—probably a couple o' thousand feet high, and I sure am dry!"

Averil flushed under her tan and grease smudges, and her amber eyes darkened.

"There's a stream right over yonder," she answered quickly. "A cup of cold water will fix you up."

Beyle scowled and deliberately reached for his flask. Averil turned away, her teeth biting into the soft insides of her lips. This was the first time since they left home that he had taken a drink before her eyes.

"First drink since sun-up, and it's noon," Beyle defended his action. "Honey, you're one fine kid, but you sure have fool ideas about likker. Still, here's luck to you!"

His daughter swung around in time to see him raise the flask in a mocking salute; but the liquor that the flask contained never reached Beyle's throat. Instead, it spattered far and wide as the bottle was shattered by a shot from Averil's thirty-eight.

"BRAVO, girl!" cheered a vibrant masculine voice. "Or am I butting into the filming of a scene from 'Ten Nights in a Barroom'?"

The actors in the tense little drama stared in startled surprise at the stranger who had addressed them. So intent had they been on each other that they had not heard the approach of the big, shiny blue automobile whose driver now approached them.

A quick glance showed Averil that he was young and good-looking—taller even than her father, muscular but slender. As he drew near, his firm lips parted in a smile that revealed dazzling white teeth. His physique, his tanned skin, his free and easy manner, his drawling speech, were characteristic of a Westerner; but his clothes—a gray homespun suit, a gray worsted topcoat, and a gray cloth cap—were those of an Easterner.

Never in all her life had Averil seen any one like him, and yet she had a strange feeling of having known that he existed. It was as if all her life had been so arranged that at this instant and in this place she and this stranger might meet. Time seemed to stand still. The past, even that one night of tragedy, was forgotten; the ugly present, the quarrel which had caused her to fire the shot that brought this man into her life, faded away while they stood and gazed at each other in vibrant silence.

The voice of Terry Beyle brought his daughter back from her trance with a start. The stranger, too, started.

"This," exploded Terry, "is just a little family argument. I'll thank you for minding your own business!"

"Sorry if I intruded, old-timer," drawled the other; "but when shots are fired in a family quarrel it immediately becomes a public matter. Besides, I'm cursed with an overgrown bump of curiosity, and—"

"Snub the talk, stranger!" Beyle cut in angrily.

"And," went on the intruder easily, "I'm tremendously impressed by the young lady's ability to shoot straight. She must be a wild Wyoming-ess."

"Wyoming!" snorted Beyle. "She's—"

"A mild Minnesota-ess," interjected Averil, her tongue loosened by fear lest her unthinking father should betray them.

The young man swept off his cap as gracefully as if it had been a ten-gallon hat. Averil saw that his hair was black and cropped very short, that his eyes were black and piercing and his nose hawklike. She noticed, too, that his cheeks were sunken, and that his tan had faded until the upper part of his face was almost white.

"When I heard the shot," he was saying, "I thought some of my riders had come this far to welcome me home. Do forgive me for butting in, but now that I've done so please tell me what the wild girls of your State do, if the mild ones shoot like you?"

Averil felt that she could not maintain her casual air or answer him lightly again.

"My father was about to break his solemn vow to quit drinking, so I—prevented him the only way I knew how," she explained frankly.

"Great!" applauded the stranger. "I've just returned from the Middle West, where the parents are struggling to curb their children's alcoholic appetites; so this gives me quite a kick."

"There's another kind o' kick that might help you," snapped Beyle. "If a man hasn't the right to take a drink after working for hours over a dod-blasted piece o' junk like this flivver, then I'm a horned toad!"

"Oh, the car's stalled!" The young man turned his attention upon the flivver. "Perhaps I can help."

"She's beyond help," Beyle answered gloomily. "If she were only a live beast—"

"But she's not," interposed the other. "She has neither a flank to spur nor an ear into which a man can whisper." Then, in a hopeful tone, he asked: "Have you a tow rope?"

"No, but we've rope from the tents that we could use. Is there a town near by?" asked Beyle, mollified by the other's spoken regard for horses.

"There isn't, but I've a repair shop on my place, and I can haul you that far."

He addressed Beyle, but his eyes were on Averil, and something in his look made her suddenly conscious of her appearance. Why, she must look a perfect sight! Probably her face was as black with grease as her father's.

"We're going to camp here for a few days," she said quickly. "Perhaps you could send out a truck or something. You shouldn't risk damaging your new car."

The young man's face fell.

"There's no danger of damaging the car," he protested. "There are better camping places in the valley, too. It's pretty cold up here at night."

"We couldn't go with you unless we cleaned up first," declared Averil; "and I don't want to delay you any longer."

"I'm in no hurry," the stranger assured her. "I was just going to stop and eat some lunch, anyway. You see, I'm only a few weeks out of hospital,

after a bout with fever, and I'm hungry all the time."

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" cried Averil. "I noticed you didn't look very well. I wonder if you'd like some good hot rabbit stew! I put it over the fire some time ago, when I saw we were likely to be stuck here."

"That would be good! Miss Minnesota, your luncheon guest is Wallis Frandin, at your service."

Averil smiled her friendly smile. Then, remembering that she must lie to this man—this man who, her heart told her, was to have a place in her life—she flushed.

"These two tramps," she said in a low tone, "are Jim Bailey and his daughter Agnes."

"Do stay," urged Beyle, his anger gone, now that he realized that the stranger could be of service to them. "Av—Agnes makes the best mulligan in the world, Mr. Frandin."

SOME time later Averil and Frandin sat side by side on the soft, fragrant carpet of pine needles, a little distance from the camp fire, talking. Beyle had had his after-dinner pipe, and was now lying on his back near the fire, snoring peacefully.

The young man thought that Averil—her face still glowing from the vigorous scrubbing she had given it, her glorious hair picturesquely ruffled by the breeze, her eyes shining—was the loveliest thing he had ever seen. Her riding clothes could not hide the curves of her perfect body. She leaned back against the trunk of a tall pine, totally unaware of the impression she was making.

"Have you any definite plans?" Frandin was asking, as he thought how much he would like to do some planning for her.

"No; but probably dad would be glad to settle down for a while if he could find a job." She glanced at Frandin from under her lashes.

"There's plenty of work on my ranch," he answered eagerly. "Three of us own the Ames River Valley, a lovely spot, cut off from the outer world by those mountains you see over there. There's Bill Fonell, who owns the Molliam Ranch, Henry Benton, whose wife, Rose, owns the R Bar A, and myself. I have the Circle F. We have our cattle together out on the range, so we'll need all the help we can get next month for the fall round-up."

"It would be nice if we could stay for the round-up!"

"For the winter, you mean," cut in Frandin. "There's an untenanted cabin you could have rent free, and I'd have it put in first-class repair. You'd like our crowd, I'm sure. There's Alice, Bill's wife. She's as nice as she's beautiful, and that's quite some. Rose would love the chance to mother you. She's Alice's elder sister, as fat as a dumpling, and a darling!"

Averil had listened with her heart in her eyes. How wonderful it would be to have friends like that! She had never known what it was to have friends of her own sex, except her schoolmates.

"What are you thinking about?" Frandin asked, laughing up into her eyes from where he lay at her side.

"I was thinking that as a rule the ladies of the ranch houses don't bother with the daughters of the ranch hands," Averil told him soberly.

Frandin laughed and waved an airy hand.

"Any one I bring to them will be welcomed," he boasted. Then, seriously: "Don't you know, my dear child, that you are lovely enough to grace a

palace? Don't you realize that you are charming enough to win—any one?"

Averil's color deepened. She shook her head.

"I'd be a fool not to know I was pretty," she answered, in a humble little voice; "but I—I know my limitations. If I do live in your valley this winter, please let me be just the daughter of one of your riders, not—your friend."

It cost her so much to say this that her voice was tragic out of all proportion to her words. In the first glow of meeting this man, whose very presence had thrilled her to the core, she had forgotten not only that she was an impostor, but that she was married!

Frandin, watching her mobile face grow solemn and lose its wild-rose color, wondered what lay beneath her words. Her next question gave him what he thought to be a clew.

"There's no town near your place? No—no speakeasies or gambling places, are there?"

"Oh, you're afraid—" Frandin nodded toward the sleeping Beyle. "No! The nearest town is thirty miles away, and it's a fine, clean little settlement. None of my riders drink, so—"

"But you'd be willing to hire one you know does?"

"Sure, when he has a little rum chaser putting shots across his bow every time he tries to ship a forbidden cargo!"

He grinned teasingly at her, but there was admiration and respect in his glance.

CHAPTER VI

AVERIL had her "glory hour" that day seated beside Frandin in his car. It was dusk when they arrived at the Circle F ranch house, where Frandin had insisted they were to stay until the cabin could be prepared for them. The sound of their approach brought out a crowd of sunburned, thin-hipped young men from the bunk-house and a fat old Chinaman from the big house. The cowmen's hearty cheers and the Chinese cook's shrill greeting warmed Averil's heart. Evidently the boss of the Circle F was well liked by his employees.

Frandin stood up and shouted that he would be right out again. He escorted Averil into the warm, brightly lit house, introduced to her Sing Lung, the cook, and showed her her room.

"Be with you at dinner," he told her, and hurried away.

A few moments later Terry Beyle came in with her shabby little bag. This was the first time they had been alone since the drinking episode.

Averil raised her eyes to her father's face. It was abject.

"Daughter," he pleaded, "can you forgive me just once more?"

Unable to speak, Averil pulled his head down and kissed his rough cheek. He caught her in his arms and pressed his lips to her brow, murmuring promises and endearments.

Averil leaned back in his arms and said solemnly:

"Terry Beyle, the first false move on your part, and we leave this haven that has been given us. I have a feeling that meeting Mr. Frandin was fate, and that it means the beginning of a new and straight life for us both."

"You've always been straight," protested Beyle. "If it weren't for me, you might become mistress of this wonderful place and—"

Averil's palm over his mouth silenced him. It was bad enough to have that idea torturing her, without hearing it expressed in words.

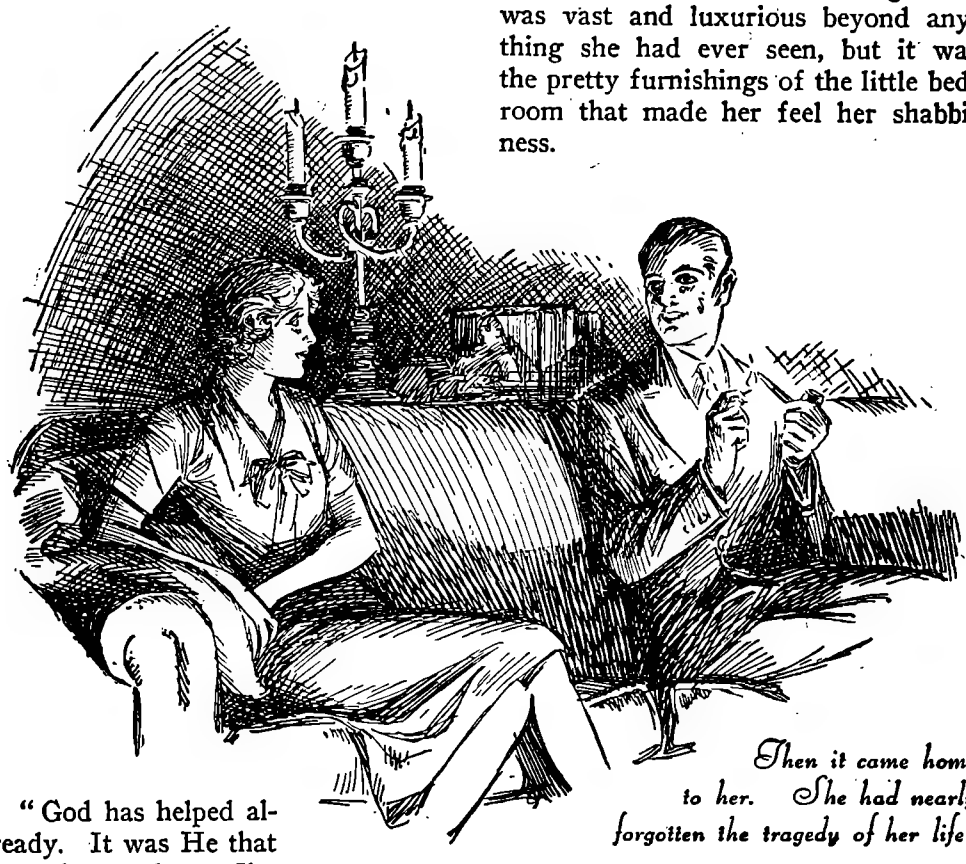
"There must be no 'ifs' from now on, dad," she whispered.

"God helping me, I'll give what's left of my worthless life to you, daughter," Beyle told her between clenched teeth.

"God has helped already. It was He that brought us here, I'm sure. Now go back to Mr. Frandin and see if there is anything he wants you to do."

As soon as she was alone, Averil opened her bag. She had not one real dress to her name, only three bungalow aprons. She chose the best of them, a white percale with green sprigs on it. This and a plain muslin slip, white cotton stockings, and a pair of black slippers were her dinner costume. She knew that it was pitifully inadequate, but not until she got up and looked around the dainty bedroom did she realize how impossibly so it was.

In her upset state, and during the talk with her father, she had not paid much attention to her surroundings. She had noticed that the living room was vast and luxurious beyond anything she had ever seen, but it was the pretty furnishings of the little bedroom that made her feel her shabbiness.



Then it came home to her. She had nearly forgotten the tragedy of her life!

She would plead fatigue, a headache, anything, for in that percale apron she never could face Wallis Frandin as his dinner guest.

Just as she had decided that hunger was preferable to humiliation, she heard some one scratch on the door. It was Sing Lung, all smiles.

"Missy catchee one piecee hot bath now?" he asked.

Beckoning her to follow him, he scuttled down the passageway to a door, which he threw open with the air

of a conjurer producing a rabbit from a hat.

What Averil saw when she peeped into the room was more wonderful than anything a magician ever brought out of a hat. Her surprise gratified the old cook, who chuckled delightedly.

"One velly fine bathloom," he boasted. "Plenty hot water!"

Averil, who had never seen anything like this shining white and nickel room, agreed with him.

"After my bath I shall go right to bed, as I'm tired out," she added. "Please tell Mr. Frandin I can't eat any dinner."

She hurried back to her bedroom, followed by the protesting Sing Lung, who, seeing that she was about to shut the door, begged her just to come "look-see" his kitchen. He was so insistent that she gave in. As he pushed open the swinging door, the smell of cooking made the girl sniff appreciatively. She had not realized how hungry she was.

"Sing Lung catchee one damfine chicken, missy," the wily old cook remarked casually, his shoe-button eyes watching the effect of his words and the savory odor. Seeing that Averil was weakening, he played his last card. He took the sizzling chicken from the oven.

Still Averil hesitated, visioning some impossibly large and elegant dining room, and her host in evening clothes. Then her eye caught sight of a dining table, set for four, in a sort of alcove off the kitchen. That decided her. Her percale apron would fit into this picture.

"Plenty apple pie," the old cook was saying. "Plenty stlong coffee. You go catchee bath—makee you feel fine!"

"Who is having dinner here?" Averil asked anxiously.

"Missa Cliff Evans, liding boss," Sing Lung told her.

WALLIS FRANDIN, entering the kitchen some time later, gazed entranced at the vision of girlish loveliness perched on a high stool, watching, wide-eyed, the cook's skillful juggling of his utensils! How pretty she was!

His eyes were not the only appreciative ones. Behind Averil's father, who had entered with his host, came another young man—a tall, rangy fellow, whose hair and skin seemed to have been weathered to the same tawny color. As Frandin introduced Cliff Evans, his top rider, to Averil, she noticed that Cliff's eyes were reddish brown, and that deep parentheses cut into his cheeks on either side of his firm mouth. He wore riding clothes, but not chaps.

Neither Cliff Evans nor Terry Beyle talked much during the meal, but Wallis Frandin seemed to be in gayer mood than during the long drive that afternoon. Averil forgot her shyness and played up to him. When he laughed and applauded her quick repartee, she was elated. It was a novel experience for her to exchange badinage with so clever and fascinating a man, and to have the eyes of another man—who, when she came to know him, might be equally interesting—fixed upon her in unconcealed admiration.

Her father, too, was frankly proud of her in her hitherto unrevealed rôle. He had not been blind to her fresh beauty, nor was he surprised when Slim Hedges fell in love with her so suddenly; but now he realized that she was clever, interesting, and charming

enough not only to attract a wealthy, cultured man like their host, but to captivate him utterly. Terry Beyle was filled with self-loathing when he thought how he had sacrificed his lovely child, who was worthy of the best that the world could offer. And he had ruined her life!

There was no way to help her, either. If he went back to Montana and killed Hedges, Averil, though free, would be the daughter of a murderer—scarcely an enviable position. If an attempt were made to annul the marriage, it would come to light that he, her father, was a cattle thief.

It was with relief that, at the end of the meal, he heard Cliff Evans invite him out to give his opinion of a new colt.

Not until she and Wallis Frandin entered the living room did Averil think of her homely clothes. Her host, it is true, still wore his gray homespun, but to a girl used to seeing men in cowpuncher outfits his attire seemed elegant.

Frandin went to the huge, rough-finished stone fireplace and replenished the fire, while Averil wandered around the big room, lost in admiration. The walls and ceiling were of logs, smoothed and polished until they reflected the flames that were leaping up the wide chimney. The floor, of smooth flagging, was strewn with bright-colored rugs. The furniture was homemade, some of the chairs being covered with skins, others upholstered with Indian blankets.

In front of the fireplace was a spacious divan piled with cushions. Beside this, on the floor, was the skin of a big brown bear. On the walls were other skins, shotguns, Indian weapons and ornaments, and a few framed engravings. These last fascinated Averil more than anything, except two wooden figurines on a little table.

THE fire burning to his satisfaction, her host crossed to her side.

"Oh, you're looking at Bill's carvings," he remarked. "This one is Sinner, my Airedale who went to dog heaven last August."

"And the other one is you in riding clothes!" cried Averil.

"Yep—couldn't miss that nose," laughed Wallis.

Averil forgot her percale apron and all that at the sound of his merriment.

"It isn't so bad when you pull your cap down over it," she replied pertly. "I dare say a sombrero is just as flattering." She set the carving back on the table, near a luster pottery bowl. "Is this Bill a sculptor?" she asked with interest.

"No, indeed, though I think he should have gone in for it. He's Bill Fonell, owner of the Molliam, across the river from my place, and he's not only husband to the loveliest lady in Wyoming, but father of the chubbiest boy baby I ever saw. I guess I told you about them before. Bill fell in love with a painting in the Metropolitan, it seems, and tried to carve the pictured girl in wood. Then Alice, who had been East to school, came back, and she was so near like the painting that he fell in love with her."

"How romantic!" breathed Averil. "Tell me more."

"Let's sit by the fire, then," he suggested.

Averil, quite unconscious of the lovely picture she made curled up in a corner of the big divan, listened, fascinated, to Wallis Frandin's kindly gossip about his neighbors.

"Rose Benton would be tickled if

she could see me now," he chuckled, after he had his pipe going well.

"Oh, she likes you to smoke a pipe?" asked Averil innocently.

"She's a born matchmaker," explained Frandin.

Startled, Averil had no answer to that. She became aware that the man at her side was watching her with amused eyes. She sought desperately for something that would lead the conversation away from this path, which, had she been free, would have been the sweetest she had ever trod. It came home to her with a sickening stab that she was not what he thought her—an unmarried girl. In this quiet room, in the company of this man, she had forgotten the tragedy of her life.

"That cabin," she began nervously, "will it be ready to-morrow?"

The laughter died on Frandin's lips, the light went out of his eyes, and his teeth bit hard on his pipe stem.

"I was hoping," he said in a strained voice, "that you might be content here for a few days, Miss Bailey. There is plenty of room, as you see, and—I won't presume to bother you, as I seem to have done to-night."

Averil sat up, her heart in her eyes, her soul crying:

"Oh, dearest of men, don't you know that I want to stay here with you always—always? I want your arms to hold me close to your heart. I want to give you my lips. I want to be yours utterly!"

So near to her lips were the words that she flung up her hand and covered her mouth, terrified that they would say themselves. Frandin had leaned forward while she fought back her confession, and now his face was very close to hers.

"Forgive me," he begged in a voice that reached and soothed her anguished soul. "I shouldn't have said that. Of course you want to have your own home and to be able to look out for your father. I had forgotten your anxiety over him. Perhaps I'd best go find him now. You must want to get to bed, too. I've been selfish keeping you up so late, child."

"I AM tired," Averil answered simply. She even managed to smile her friendly little smile as she stood up. "Good night, Mr. Frandin. I—I have been very happy here with you to-night."

"Not nearly so happy as I have been," Frandin told her earnestly, as he stepped aside to let her pass him.

At the curtained doorway Averil paused and glanced back. He was only a few feet away, his eyes fixed upon her yearningly. For a pulsating second they stood thus with eyes locked. A swift stride, and he was at her side, her hands clasped in his.

"Don't think me quite mad," he blurted out, "but there's a strange feeling in my heart that—oh, don't look like that, my dear, I'm not taking advantage of the fact that we are here alone to make light love to you, believe me! When I first saw you standing with that smoking pistol in your hand and your face lit with high resolve, I experienced the most curious feeling. It was not that I had ever seen or met you before, but it was as if—oh, it's so difficult to put it into words! It was as if our paths were crossing for some great reason.

"The feeling has deepened with each passing moment until now it seems that you belong to—belong here. Perhaps it's just the fancy of a man who isn't quite back to his normal state of health; but it's very strong."

Incapable of speech, Averil let her hands lie in his warm, vital clasp. Her eyes searched his, and she knew that he had spoken truly. In his eyes there was no carnal desire, such as she had seen in Hedges's gaze. They were adoring, but misted by something that seemed to perplex and bewilder their owner.

"Say something!" he was pleading. "Say that you understand—although I don't see how you can when I don't myself," he added ruefully.

Averil found speech then.

"But somehow I do understand. I mean that when you walked up to me this afternoon, I felt that you were walking into my life. As you say, there was no feeling that I had seen you before, but it seemed as if I had been waiting—"

She broke off, conscious that she was on the verge of a confession.

"You had been waiting—" he prompted, crushing her hands tighter and leaning nearer.

Averil drew in a sharp breath and forced herself to break the spell.

"Why," she cried, "I think we're bewitched! It has been nice to be that way, though, for one evening. Shall we forget it now, and be ourselves when we meet to-morrow?"

"Don't! To-night we are ourselves —our true selves."

Averil shrugged.

"As you like. What I mean is that to-morrow and all the to-morrows to come must see us in our proper places —you, boss of the ranch; me, daughter of one of your riders."

Frandin's answer to this was sharp and quick:

"If it pleases you to play-act, you may; but just for one minute will you be yourself, dear? I shall never bother you again, I swear, unless you tell me I may. Just one minute I ask; then it will be only a memory in my heart, and perhaps in yours."

He drew her into the circle of his arms. Her own heart and his pleadings won—their lips met in a long, ecstatic kiss. Once more time stood still, as it had when first their eyes met.

Averil slipped from his arms, and, without a backward glance, passed between the curtains.

CHAPTER VII.

AVERIL awoke at dawn, as she had done on the morning after her marriage, and lay wondering what had happened to her. Remembering, she let herself be lapped in bliss for a little while. Then, one by one, came thoughts that pierced and shattered the bright bubble.

Her marriage definitely separated her from the man she loved. Her father had proved only yesterday that his good resolutions were not to be trusted. Even worse, he was a cattle thief and a fugitive from justice. Neither Wallis Frandin nor Cliff Evans would have sat at table with him had they known that, and much less would they allow him to work for them. The ranch hands would scorn him.

Another thought, a new one, struck her—she had let herself be embraced and kissed by two different men. More than that, she had responded to both—to her husband far less than to Wallis Frandin, it was true; but perhaps that was only because he had come to her without warning. In his case the budding emotion had been forced by too hot and quick a breath; while the long hours she had spent with Wallis at the camp, in the homeward-bound car, at dinner, and in the seductive atmosphere of that quiet room, had led her

by logical steps to the rapturous climax. Still, even during those moments when they had sat before the camp fire talking, she was as much his in her heart as she would ever be.

Tiny prickles of shame ran through her, and she grew hot and angry at herself. Was she a girl who would love any man and allow any man to love her? Who, when fate led her into a situation such as that hour in the barn or that hour last night, would wallow in it? She had been, but most decidedly she never would be again. She sat up abruptly, kicked off the bedclothes, and scrambled out of bed.

Bathed and dressed in her old riding clothes, she stood before the mirror, trying to subdue her unruly curls and gain courage to face the man she loved; for she would have to face him. He was not going to ride away, as Hedges had done. Several times she had gone to the door and listened. Each time she had heard the voices of Frandin, her father, Evans, and Sing Lung.

Once more she reconnoitered. All was quiet. She was about to leave her room when she heard a great noise in the yard. Going to the window, she saw Frandin and half a dozen men on horseback.

Her first thought was that she would not have to meet him for a few hours, at least. Her next was to wonder at the change that riding clothes—well tailored English togs—made in him. There was an air about him which told any one that he was the "big boss," the owner of a prosperous ranch. He sat his horse with surprising grace for so tall a man. His voice was not loud, but his speech and his gestures were those of a commander.

She watched the cavalcade ride off, with clatter of hoofs and gay shouts, before she turned away. If only she had work to do, as she had had on the morning after her marriage — work that would keep her thoughts away from her tragic plight!

SING LUNG greeted her with smiles and scuttled about preparing her breakfast—luscious melon, crisp bacon, creamy scrambled eggs, buttered toast, corn bread and coffee.

"Missa Wallis tell me tell you he fix cabin damfine to-day fo' you. You catchee to-night sure," he told her.

"Oh, they're going to repair the cabin right away?" asked Averil, feeling foolishly discomfited.

The Chinaman bobbed his head several times. Presently he spoke again.

"Sing Lung think better Missa Wallis catchee plenty lie-down, sit-down now," he said. "Not lide horse. Not work allee time. Sing Lung say, 'Boy, go easy few days — catchee plenty sick stlange places. Boy, you damfool go 'way flom lanch, flom Sing Lung velly fine chow.' Missa Wallis laugh, say me shut up old fool mouth."

"He must have been very ill," agreed Averil, "and he ought to rest for a while, not ride and work. As for going to strange places, as you call them, Sing Lung, he probably had to go on business. He can't stay on the ranch all the time; but I've no doubt that he missed your wonderful cooking."

"Plenty damfool business," retorted the Chinaman with surprising bitterness. "One good thing, he catchee you. You makee him sit down talkee allee samee love talk like last night?" he asked hopefully and anxiously.

Averil flushed and gasped, but she managed to assure Sing that she would see what she could do. Then she beat a hasty retreat to her room.

After making the bed she hurried out on the porch. From there she could

see that the ranch lay, as Wallis had told her, in a valley shut away from the world by high mountains. There was snow on their peaks, and their sides were heavily timbered. To the south there stretched great meadows, on which thousands of cattle ranged.

Going around the house, she could see a golden, winding river not so far away. Near by there were cottonwood trees, evidently planted to protect the lawn and vegetable garden from the heat of the summer sun. There were corrals, stable yards, stables, barns, and chicken houses scattered around, but the whole place was well laid out and well kept.

Sing Lung, at work in his vegetable garden, which still boasted cabbages and a few other winter things, called to her:

"You come look-see—me one damfine gardener! Me catchee good dinner noontime eve'y day," he went on. "Supper fi' 'clock. Only last night makee big feast allee samee dinner."

From the pantry he brought an Airedale puppy, which he showed to Averil, telling her that it was a son of the deceased Sinner, and that he was raising it as a surprise for the boss. She cuddled it and fed it warm milk.

"You like?" asked Sing Lung. "Me catchee allee samee one flom Missy Benton when you live cabin. She own mother dog, Letty."

"Oh, I'd love to have one! Thank you, Sing Lung!"

CHAPTER VIII

ONE warm, secret glance, and the dread meeting with Wallis was over. After that he was genial host and kindly friend. Averil felt that he would keep his promise not to "bother" her again.

During the course of the meal Averil said:

"Sing Lung is worried about you. He thinks you ought to rest after your illness."

To her surprise, Frandin's answer was almost violent.

"I'm all right," he declared. "I want to forget that illness—forget it entirely!"

Cliff Evans, who had been talking horses to Terry Beyle, looked up at his employer with raised eyebrows, but said nothing.

That afternoon, mounted on a pretty chestnut mare named Brownie, Averil rode over to the cabin with Wallis and her father. She was delighted with the place and the surroundings, and told Frandin so. It was smaller than her old home, but on its western side there was a porch which made her feel that her "glory hours" would be quite as wonderful as they had been in Montana. The cabin had been newly painted inside and whitewashed outside, as had the outhouse and chicken coops.

"The truck will be over with some furniture that I've had stored in a barn," Frandin told her. "Next time I go to town you must come and buy whatever else you need. Provisions, of course, are part of your father's wages, but if you need anything—well, please give me the pleasure of supplying it."

Averil flashed him a glance of friendly gratitude.

"How kind you are!" she said. "Your trusting my father will mean his salvation. Some day I may be able to repay you in part."

Frandin opened his mouth to answer, but thought better of it.

Two men, Squeak Harris—when he spoke you understood the nickname—and Lon Newman, were putting the fin-

ishing touches to the cabin's overhauling. When they were introduced to Averil, they smiled wide, friendly smiles and declared they were at her service any time.

The truck arrived with the furniture, which proved to be serviceable handmade stuff, just as a flivver appeared from the opposite direction. Frandin grinned down at Averil as he saw the little car.

His eyes devoured the vision before him

"Just as I thought," he said. "Rose has heard of your arrival, and, bless her heart, she's come over to see if she can help out."

Averil liked Rose Benton at once, as did every one who met her. Rose was frankly fat, and it worried her not a bit. She was proud of her plump but shapely legs. Her face was pretty and good-natured, her hair blondined and curled. She always wore pink or rose color, and she never put on riding clothes.

She greeted Averil in her warm contralto voice, kissed Frandin affectionately, and threw Terry Beyle a friendly smile.

"We'll gossip later — eh, Miss Bailey?—and get acquainted. Just now let's get busy on the cabin. Well, Squeak, you and Lon sure slung mean paint brushes! Now get that furniture into the house, and Miss Bailey'll tell you what layout she prefers. I've brought some stuff for curtains, Miss Bailey. We can cut it, and then you can come home with me to sew it on my machine — an electric one, my dear. You can stay all night, and your dad can bunk in with the boys. You can run along now, Walley, and take the others except Squeak with you. He can measure for us."

All this in one stream, punctuated by little gasps. Averil's jaw dropped and Terry's eyes grew round, but the others seemed used to Rose's little way of managing things. Frandin, however, winked at Averil and chuckled.

By dusk the furniture was in place, the windows washed, the pump in working order, and the kitchen floor measured for linoleum. Rose, it seemed, had just bought a new floor covering for her big kitchen, and there would be plenty of the old for Averil's. The curtains, too, were cut, and Averil and Rose were on their way to the Benton ranch house.

AVERIL had the feeling of being carried along on a pleasant but irresistible current. It was wonderful to be taken care of, instead of having to take care of others, and Rose's unaffected kindness almost reduced her to tears.

They crossed the river at the ford, and arrived at their destination in time for supper. Mrs. Benton, *en route*, had asked a few pointed questions, but in so interested and kindly a way that Averil did not mind. In return Rose had told the newcomer most of the family history.

Henry Benton proved to be a small man with a long mustache and a frightened air. This last, Averil found out later, was only in evidence when he was with his wife. He could boss his ranch hands as well as the next.

Averil thought the supper delicious, but Rose complained endlessly to Lum Key, the cook. He, however, paid no attention.

Later William and Alice Fonell came visiting. Alice looked too young and slender to be the mother of the chubby baby she proudly displayed to Averil. She had a lovely oval face, with quantities of soft, dusky hair, wide-set, brilliantly blue eyes, and a sweet mouth. Fonell was strikingly handsome in his dark way, and had the air of authority that Wallis Frandin had. It was plain that the young couple were very much in love with each other and supremely happy.

Alice was obviously curious about the newcomer to their valley, having heard of her through the medium of the "grapevine telephone" of the Chinese help. In answer to her questioning glance, Rose smiled and nodded. Then she spoke to Fonell.

"Do you mind taking a look-see at Letty, Bill? She's not so well and she snaps at her pups."

As soon as the two men left the room, Rose began.

"Wally's been sick, Alice, and looks peeky still," she said. "What he needs is a wife to look after him." She turned to Averil. "I must confess I've tried my best to find a wife for the handsome idiot, but—"

"As a matchmaker," cut in Alice, "you're a flop! You made a fine mess of things when you tried to arrange things for Bill and me."

Rose ignored the interruption.

"But it looks as if he's not so slow as I've always thought him. He's brought back a prettier girl than any I've ever wished on him—eh, Alice?"

"I agree with you there," answered Alice; "but you are a tactless old darling. Look at the poor girl blushing, you wretch!"

"Jennyfret!" cried Rose. "In this day and age there's a girl who can blush! Wonder what she'd look like in she-clothes," she went on, as if Averil were not there. "Appealing, I bet!"

Averil buried her face in the folds of the baby's blanket and tried not to hear. It had been hard enough to deceive these kindly people about her name and history, but if they continued their matchmaking schemes the situation would become intolerable.

"Don't forget, Rose," Alice said, as

she was leaving, "I want you and Henry to come early Saturday evening." She turned to Averil. "I'm giving a big party on Saturday, and I'd like you and your father to come. Wallis and Cliff are coming, and several other young men, as well as some unmarried girls, so don't think it's to be only for old married people."

"I've never been to a real party, except girls' affairs at school, I've never danced with a man, and I have nothing to wear; so I'm afraid—"

"She'll be there with bells on, Alice," interjected Rose.

"Atta girl!" applauded Fonell.

Before they went to bed the curtains were hemmed and Rose had dug out some household linen for her new friend. Next morning, immediately after breakfast, she led Averil to her "store." It was a large room whose shelves were laden with all sorts of material for clothes and household needs.

"I'm going to make you a party dress," she announced. "Your dancing lessons you'll have to take from Wally. Now, let me see—it's too bad you can't wear pink, because most of the stuff is that color. Oh, I know—I've some green voile I bought for Ivy Talbot, to deck her up so that John Steele would notice her. She landed him without it, so—well, it sure becomes you," Rose declared, as she draped the soft folds about Averil.

CHAPTER IX

SATURDAY evening came at last. Wallis Frandin and Cliff Evans stopped at the Beyle cabin to pick up Averil and her father and drive them over to the Fonells'. There Alice greeted her warmly and led her to a bedroom, where Rose was playing with baby Billy. Averil slipped out of her long ulster and stood revealed in her first real party dress.

"Oh, how lovely you are!" cried Alice.

"Mrs. Benton made this for me," Averil explained.

Though made in a simple style, the dress revealed the exquisite curves of her girlish body, and its color did nice things to her tanned skin. Excitement had crimsoned her cheeks and made her eyes shine. Her lips, red as decanted wine, curved into a happy smile. She had made up her mind to enjoy her first party to the utmost.

Rose, in her pink silk gown, looked as pretty as the flower whose name she bore. Alice wore a gown of crimson georgette that enhanced her exotic beauty. Going to the mirror, she powdered her face lightly. Seeing Averil's eyes on her, she pushed the box toward the girl, with a wad of fresh cotton wool.

"It's the new sun-tan powder—try some," she urged. "Just a film on your nose."

"Has Wally seen you in that outfit?" demanded Rose suddenly. When Averil shook her head, she went on: "Well, I want to see his face when he does. Here, Alice, take your child!"

At the door of the living room Averil would have bolted but for Rose's restraining hand, for there were so many strangers present. It was a larger room than the one at the Circle F ranch house, and more luxuriously furnished, but it had the same hospitable air.

At sight of Mrs. Benton, Frandin hurried across the room to her. With a quick pull, Rose drew Averil out into the room. She had her reward.

"Teck, you are simply perfect!" the young man exclaimed with a gasp.

The name caught Rose away from her gloating.

"Teck?" she questioned.

"Just a nickname," explained Frandin airily. "Miss Bailey and I have agreed to be pals, so we have cut out the 'Miss' and 'Mr.,' and as she doesn't like her first name—"

"Jennyfret!" exploded Rose, sinking upon the nearest chair. "Pals! Oh, my sainted aunt! Well, whatever 'Teck' may be short for, it isn't technique. There's no such thing as this pal stuff between a girl and a man."

"We're the exception that 'll prove the rule, Mrs. Benton," Averil told her, smiling at the other's consternation.

Muttering and shaking her head, Rose got up and trotted away.

Frandin led Averil to a divan in a far corner. For a while they sat there in silence, watching the dancers keeping step to the music that came to them by radio from a thousand miles away. The girl leaned back, thinking of the afternoon when the name "Teck" had been given her. It was the first time that she and Wallis had been alone after that scene in his home. They had solemnly agreed to be pals forever, each knowing that it was just a bridge over the dangerous waters of love, which might at any time wash away their flimsy subterfuge. He had asked her to call him Wallis; but she had demurred. Then he had remembered an old college name, Ace, and that had been decided upon. There was no rime or reason for Averil's nickname other than that she liked it.

So for three days they had been Teck and Ace, real pals.

"Shall we dance?" Frandin was asking.

"I haven't danced since school days," Averil confessed; "but I'll try."

After the first few awkward motions they matched steps perfectly, and Averil gave herself up to the hitherto unknown delight of dancing with a man.

Despite Frandin's scowl and muttered protest, his host cut in. Bill Fonell was a good dancer and an even better talker; but presently he led his partner over to his wife. Alice Fonell took Averil in hand and introduced her to some of the other guests, who were obviously curious about the beautiful newcomer.

Remembering Rose Benton and her matchmaking, Averil smiled to herself when she met Ivy Talbot, a tall, dark girl, and her merry-looking *fiancé*, John Steele. She danced with Steele and found him very amusing. Frandin cut in and asked what the joke was; but Averil, with newly acquired coquetry, refused to tell him.

Then John Steele's brother, Tony, tried to cut in, but Frandin shooed him away. Cliff Evans seemed about to make an attempt, but apparently thought better of it. An elderly man, Colonel White, was not so easily frightened off. He was doomed to dance only a few minutes with Averil, however, for Cliff lost no time in cutting in.

AVERIL smiled her friendly smile at the top rider of the Circle F. During the short time she had been living in her new home, Cliff had been her most willing and efficient helper.

"I thought I'd never get to dance with you," Evans was complaining. "I didn't have the nerve to grab you away from the boss, after I saw the way he growled at those other guys."

"Didn't you, now?" laughed Averil. "Faint heart—"

Just then the radio music was interrupted for a news bulletin.

"Let's go out on the porch," suggested Evans. "There's a full moon just coming up over the mountains, and it looks swell."

"Let's sit down in here somewhere, instead."

"Aw, Miss Bailey, just come out until the music starts again!"

Averil went reluctantly, but agreed with her escort that the moon was worth coming out for. After the warm room the wind outside was rather chilly, and the girl shivered in her thin dress. In an instant Cliff's coat was off and wrapped around her. Taken aback, she protested, and tried to wriggle out of it, but he held it tightly. Not wanting to make a scene at this, her first social appearance, Averil submitted.

"The moon," remarked Evans in a husky voice, "is next to the most beautiful sight to be seen this night." When Averil remained silent, he explained: "I mean, Miss Bailey, that you're the most beautiful. I think you're the prettiest girl I ever saw in my life!"

Considerably startled, Averil groped for words.

"The moon," she gravely stated after a few seconds, "has the reputation of making people talk foolishly."

"You think I'm a fool, then?" demanded Evans hotly.

"Of course I don't; but please do be your nice, sensible self."

"How can I, with you out here in the moonlight?" breathed Cliff.

"Then I shall have to go inside, Mr. Evans."

Frantic at the thought of losing what he evidently regarded as his golden opportunity, Evans caught her wrists in one hand and drew her closer to him.

"Listen, Agnes, I'm crazy about you! I—"

"You mustn't—"

"Aw, you're playing for the boss, eh? Well, lemme tell you, that big stiff wouldn't marry Venus in pink tights! Now don't butt in. If it's a boss you want, I'm going to be a boss my own self after the round-up. Listen, kid, for two years I been branding mavericks with my own iron—"

"How can there be mavericks when there are only three ranches—"

"Now, don't teach this old bird his business," cut in Cliff. "I've run my brand on a few hundred swell little dogies, and after I cut 'em out of the herd, I'm going to go up the valley and start on my own, instead of selling myself for a few lousy dollars a month. So, kid, if you're aiming to marry a boss, marry Cliff Evans. You acted friendly enough when I was working for you."

Averil, who was about to burst out angrily at his remarks about Frandin, remained silent. Cliff was not entirely to blame for the situation. She ought not to have been masquerading as a single girl.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Evans," she said gently, "if you mistook my friendliness for a deeper interest. Marrying you is out of the question."

"Oh, it is, is it?" snarled the man. "If it was that Frandin—"

"It is not necessary to bring in the name of any other man," Averil interrupted, furious.

"I might bring in your old man's name," sneered Evans.

AVERIL'S heart gave a sickening leap and seemed to stand still. What did this man know? His next words quieted that fear, but gave rise to another nearly as terrible.

"Beyle agreed to go in with me in my new scheme," Cliff was saying. "I'm going to register my brand in his name, and we'll be partners."

When Evans had first told her of branding mavericks, she had been suspicious; now she felt sure that his interpretation of the word was so broad that he was afraid to register the brand in his own name. Probably he would not hesitate to run his iron on any calf that was unbranded, even though a branded mother might be nursing it.

Averil threw back her head proudly and answered in an even tone:

"My father will have nothing to do with your scheme. Now let me go, and never dare speak to me again!"

"A chit like you having the nerve to think she can boss a pair of grown he-men!" retorted Cliff with a laugh.

Instead of releasing her, he drew her closer to his breast. His lips were sickeningly near to hers.

"Cliff Evans," she threatened tensely, "if you don't let me go instantly, you'll be the sorriest man in Wyoming to-night!"

"How'll you make me sorry, baby girl?"

A furious masculine voice—Frandin's—answered for her.

"I don't know what Miss Bailey's plans for your punishment are, Evans, but I do know my own!"

Cliff's arms fell away from Averil, and he whirled to face his boss, who stood, fury-white, with fists clenched, ready to flail him. Evans, too, though taken aback, was ready instantly; and there they stood in the bright moonlight, eying each other like raging tigers about to battle.

Suddenly they leaped and met. Their powerful bodies grappled and swayed. Evans worked himself loose and shot an overhand at Frandin, who dodged, and, with his full weight back of the blow, planted his fist on the other's chin. Evans's head flew back, his knees gave way, and he pitched forward and lay still.

Frandin shook himself. For a long instant he stood looking down at the unconscious man; then he raised accusing eyes to the blanched face of the girl, who was leaning against a porch pillar. He spoke slowly, regretfully.

"I've made an enemy of Evans, and he was a good man. I don't want to be rude, Miss Bailey, but when a girl comes out on a porch in the moonlight with a man and lets him put his coat on her and embrace her, well—really, she ought to expect the man to take advantage of his opportunity."

For a fraction of a second Averil stared at Frandin in silent amazement. Then blind rage surged through her.

"How dare you?" she cried. "Oh, how dare you?"

Down the steps she darted, her hopes and plans for a new life for herself and her father shattered, her very soul sick within her. Across the moonlit yard she raced to the bunk house.

TO BE CONTINUED

"If you do not give him up I swear I will kill myself before your eyes!"

Her Prince

Out of her great love for him she gave him up—for his country's sake. But the Kingdom of Love would not be denied!

By Rosalee Tree

Author of "In the Eyes of the World"

MYRA RAND pressed her pale, pretty face to the taxi window. The cab that brought her from the Charity Luncheon at the Hotel Belvedere, where she had volunteered to act as a waitress, had penetrated the Montparnasse section of Paris. The street was blocked by a shouting crowd of urchins, and the taxi had been forced to stop. Suddenly Myra saw that the ringleaders of the crowd were annoying a beautiful Russian wolfhound, and a cry of indignation escaped her beautiful curved, rose-red lips.

"Hurry! Do something! Make them stop that!" she said to the driver of the cab, a stoical, bearded Frenchman, who promptly shrugged.

"It is not my dog, *mademoiselle*," he retorted indifferently.

With indignation blazing, Myra flung open the door of the vehicle. Animals had always been one of her weaknesses. Now, as she set her small feet on the rough cobbles of the street,

a fresh shower of sticks and stones sent the dog back against the brick wall adjoining what Myra imagined was a building devoted to studios. She had time for little more than a glance. With a breath she pushed a valiant way through to the ringleaders.

These were two dirty-faced, jersey-clad ragamuffins, who leered at her.

"Leave that dog alone!" Myra cried, hardly realizing they probably did not understand English. "How dare you hurt him? You should be arrested—"

The older of the two rapped out something in guttural French that brought a hoot from the crowd. They pressed in closer, menacing in their attitude. Myra cast a glance at the taxi down the street. The driver lounged in his seat, stuffing a huge pipe with tobacco.

Another howl went up from the crowd as the first boy grasped Myra's arm roughly. She had a picture of being showered with the same sticks and stones.

Then, apparently out of nowhere, a young man appeared.

"Be gone! Be off with you!"

A clout or two sent the ringleaders reeling away. The rest of the crowd dispersed. The Russian wolfhound limped across to where Myra stood. She patted its proud head and lifted her grateful blue eyes to him who had appeared so opportunely on the scene.

"How can I thank you, *mademoiselle?* You are a true *Jeanne d'Arc!*"

For some unknown reason Myra's heart skipped a beat. She found herself looking into steadfast gray eyes. They belonged to the handsomest young man she had ever beheld. He was tall, very dark and distinguished, with the sun on his lean young face and the breeze in his ruffed hair. Slim, athletically built, the corduroy trousers, sash, flannel shirt and paint-specked jacket that proclaimed the artist could not hide his innate dignity.

AT that moment, as they stood gazing at each other, Myra felt an electrical current pass from his glance to hers. Somehow it was as if this meeting in the shabby street, with Paris roaring by, was ordained. She could not explain it. A sweet, shadowy confusion held her in a momentary spell.

"I must thank you," she said unsteadily. "I—I don't know what would have happened if you hadn't stepped in when you did."

He shook his head amiably.

"But, *mademoiselle,* it is my dog." He ran his hand over the wolfhound's sleek coat. "Boris probably was tired of being confined in the garden. I missed him when I heard the first shouting. I live yonder. Won't you come into the garden and let me give you some tea?"

In a moment Myra found herself in a combined courtyard and garden that might have been a stage scene from some medieval French drama. Bright flowers were a border on all four sides of the inclosure. A tree grew bravely, sheltering two or three small tables. All around were windows, the windows of the studios, but Myra saw only the gray eyes of the handsome young man.

"My name is Christopher Dell," he said when the *concierge* had brought tea. "I am playing at art. Really, Boris and I are vagabonds. Vagabonds in Paris."

Myra smiled. Christopher Dell. It sounded like an American or English name. She was confident, however, that the man opposite her was neither. He spoke perfect English with no ac-

cent, but he had a foreign look to him, an air of breeding and distinction.

"Are you English?"

He shook his head humorously.

"*Mademoiselle,* I have a little of every nationality in me. You are an American girl," he went on, seeming to change the subject easily. "Won't you tell me who you are?"

Myra reflected rapidly. It came to her that her true identity might serve to make ill at ease the self-confessed vagabond who smiled at her with gray, interested eyes. She would not tell him she was Myra Rand, the daughter of the wealthy Otis Rand, millionaire mining operator, who had left yesterday for the Balkan kingdom of Marvania. Somehow riches had no place in that courtyard-garden.

"My name is Myra," she said impulsively, "Myra Dean." Dean was the name of her maid. She glanced down at the waitress costume. "I am employed by some people named Rand. I am staying with them at the Hotel Belvedere, on the Boulevard Haussmann."

He accepted her explanation with a clasp of his strong hand. While the wolfhound sprawled between them, methodically licking his wounds, Christopher Dell, as he called himself, showed Myra what an interesting, witty and perfect conversationalist he was.

He had apparently been all over the world. He spoke of Italy, of Naples and Capri, and then, in another breath, he was recounting some delightful adventure in Scotland, Bavaria or Switzerland. The fascination and sparkle of his word pictures held Myra entranced.

Who was he really? No vagabond of the road could have known so much of life in such a short span of years. She hung on his words eagerly, still knowing an indefinable breathlessness.

IT was almost an hour later that Myra, feeling the instinctive tug of watching eyes, looked up. In the window of a room a story above them a girl stood, peering down between the curtains she parted. Myra's quick glance up at her was sufficient only to glimpse a hostile face, wide, burning black eyes, a scarlet mouth and coral hoops that hung below the blue-black hair draped over the girl's ears.

Instantly the curtains fell back in place and the watcher disappeared. Christopher Dell stooped to pat the dog and Myra, with a little shiver, stood.

"I—I must be going. I really shouldn't have stayed so late. My mistress will be needing me."

Together they walked to the wooden door that led out on the cobbled street. The shadows of the tree lengthened. A tranquil hush had settled down for an interval. Myra felt the strange, heavy beat of her heart.

"To-morrow night," she heard Christopher Dell saying, "the artists in the quarter here are giving an entertainment and street festival. Couldn't you persuade your mistress to give you the evening off?"

"I think so. Are you sure you really want me to come?" she asked shyly.

"Yes!"

That single word for Myra seemed to hold a wealth of promise. She slipped her fingers, slender and rose-tipped, into the hand Christopher Dell extended. His look was like a sword, expressive of mysterious, expectant things. Then the door was open and the street lay before her.

"Good-by, Myra, for a little while. *Au revoir.*"

Outside, midway toward the avenue, the taxi with the stoical chauffeur still waited, its engine running and its toll-meter mechanically ticking off its fare.

With a glance over her sloping shoulder that was almost one of guilt for her harmless deception, Myra climbed into the vehicle.

THE young man who called himself Christopher Dell walked slowly across the courtyard, whistling to Boris. When the Russian wolfhound joined him he opened the door of the second building on the south side of the garden and went up two flights of wooden stairs.

The room he entered was a typical studio. Its north-lighted windows were set at a slant. An easel stood before them. It contained a canvas upon which had been partially painted the likeness of a girl with blue-black hair, burning black eyes and a provocative scarlet mouth. For the rest the room contained a narrow cot, several chairs and a battered table.

Christopher Dell lighted a cigarette and took a turn about the room. The charm and beauty of the girl he had entertained under the tree in the courtyard lingered with him like a haunting cadence of violin music. How little she was, how inexpressibly lovely! He had not met many American girls. This Myra Dean seemed so representative of her race. And she was only a maid, a humble, obscure little person.

A sudden knock on the door interrupted his dreamy reflections. Dell crossed slowly and threw the door open. The girl Myra had observed watching from the window of the room on the second floor slipped lithely in.

"Lilas! I told you I would not need you to pose until to-morrow," Dell said.

Lilas kicked the door shut and advanced slowly. In the gathering gloom of the room, and at close range, Lilas Lescourte was strikingly beautiful in an exotic, flashing way. Her eyes still burned like black stars. Whatever emotion she felt made her full, scarlet lips tremulous.

"I know it!" Her voice was a rich contralto, in perfect accord with the French she spoke. "Who was that girl you were having tea with?"

Christopher Dell frowned through his cigarette smoke. For a month Lilas Lescourte had been his model for the portraits he painted. He vaguely understood the girl was a dancer in one of the music halls. She had told him she was half French and half Spanish. She had interested him because of her gypsy coloring and type.

"What possible interest can the young lady be to you?" he inquired.

The girl clicked her high heels impatiently.

"I do not know who she is. She may be English or American. But I do know this. You are infatuated with her! Do not tell me differently. I am a woman and I know!"

A faint expression of annoyance crossed Dell's handsome face.

"And if I am? My dear Lilas, you concern yourself unnecessarily. I am sure that the private pulsebeats of my heart are of no interest to you."

The girl made a savage gesture.

"That is what you think! You force me to tell you something! You compel me to confess that I am in love with you!"

IN his astonishment Dell dropped his cigarette. When he picked it up he had regained the coolness that characterized him.

"Surely you are jesting—"

"Jesting!" Lilas Lescourte laughed harshly. "Do I jest when I show you the secrets of my heart? All these days I have sat while you painted my portrait, all the long hours have brought me knowledge. I have told no other man that one thing. I tell *you* because I love you! I do not mean to give you up, see you fall in love with a doll-faced American girl, some rich woman's maid!"

For a long minute Christopher Dell looked at her slowly.

"I am sorry, Lilas. Sorry that you told me this. You see, I am not in love with you. As for the American girl—we will leave her out of the conversation. Now, don't you think it is perhaps time for supper? Suppose you get your hat and cape. I will take you to the Singing Magpie and have the orchestra play a czardas. Is it a bargain?"

"You want me to forget love?"

"It might," Dell murmured, "be a good idea."

Lilas Lescourte shook her head, a faint smile edging her full lips.

"I shall never give you up! You do not love me now, but some day you shall. Meanwhile I shall hold you, keep you from making a fool of yourself over this yellow-headed, blue-eyed American."

"How do you intend to hold me?"

Her look was enigmatic. She laid her creamy, olive-skinned hand impulsively on his arm.

A full minute elapsed before she answered.

"*Monsieur,* for the past four nights an old man has come here to see you—"

"Old Nicholas!" Christopher Dell exclaimed involuntarily.

"Being a woman, I am curious by nature. What did this old man want of you? Last night I crept upstairs and listened outside your door. I heard your conversation. *I know who you are!*"

Christopher Dell's mouth tightened. Motionless, only his gray eyes alert and speculative, he stood tall and dignified against the tapestry of shadows that wove their background for him.

"So you know? Well, what do you intend to do with that information?"

"That depends upon you. I will have to think it over. I know you would not like to have me make your identity public. I am sure," she added significantly, "we can adjust matters satisfactorily. Now," she went on in a changed, brighter tone, "I'll get my hat, and we will go to the Singing Magpie. I will whistle when ready."

The door opened and closed. Her steps dwindled on the stairs. Christopher Dell moved slowly across to the window that looked out upon the courtyard-garden. In fancy he saw himself sitting there with a girl whose eyes were the blue of a far-away sea, whose hair was buttercup yellow, and whose lips were roses.

Downstairs a whistle sounded. The girl who had confessed her love for him was waiting. . . .

LATE in the afternoon Myra Rand returned from the splendid beauty parlor on the Rue St. Honoré. Her fluffy gold hair had been finger-waved as only a Parisian expert could do it, and her rose-tipped fingers glimmered from a manicure. In her blue, heavily lashed eyes was bright expectancy. She went up to their third floor suite of the hotel and admitted herself.

Her mother was visiting at Trouville, and her father would be at Marvania for at least another fortnight. Perhaps, so Otis Rand had said, he

would return there again with his wife and daughter. The prospect had thrilled Myra not a little. She had always wanted to see a real Balkan kingdom.

Marvania, tucked away in the Balkan mountains, must be colorful and interesting. She had read a good deal about it the previous winter in the newspapers at home. At the time Crown Prince Otto of Marvania had started on his African exploring expedition. Several months later Myra had read how natives with the party, reaching the outposts of civilization, had reported the death of Otto in some wilderness rapids.

She knew that his younger brother, Prince Bayard, was next in line for the throne of Marvania, and she also knew that the old king had been ill and ailing since the news of his eldest son's disaster. Myra had decided that the little kingdom, so rich in legend and romance, would be an ideal place to visit before she sailed back to the States.

In the boudoir Myra was met by Hilda Dean, the maid who attended her mother and herself. Hilda held a letter in one hand and looked perplexed.

"I do not understand this, Miss Myra. This note was delivered by a messenger an hour ago. It must be for you, though it says *Myra Dean* on the envelope. I did not open it."

For a month Lilas had posed for him

The throb of her pulses startled Myra. She accepted the letter, slit it open with a convenient buttonhook, and sat down before her vanity. The letter was written in poor English. Her heart sank a little. For just a minute she had imagined it might be from the one who called himself Christopher Dell.

MADEMOISELLE:

Be warned. The person you had tea with yesterday afternoon is not for you. Only harm to him can come from your seeing him again. This is friendly advice that must not be disregarded.

ONE WHO KNOWS.

Into Myra's mind flashed a picture of a second floor window. Once more she saw the watching dark-haired girl.

Unsteadily she tore the anonymous communication into small pieces.

"Was the letter for you, Miss Myra?"

Hilda, laying out the dress Myra had expressed a wish to wear, turned.

"The letter," Myra replied slowly, "was for neither of us. Oh, Hilda, I don't want to wear anything good tonight. I'm going to a street carnival in the Latin Quarter."

The maid looked puzzled.

"But, then, you will—"

"My old brown dress, please," Myra interrupted. "And don't worry about me. I shall be quite all right."

Old though the dress was, it was a chalice for Myra's childish and intense loveliness. She slipped on a coat, pulled a small felt hat down over the polished brightness of her lustrous hair, and looked at herself in the mirror.

"Are you sure you'll be safe? Paris is such a wicked city!" the maid said anxiously.

Myra laughed gayly.

"Oh, Hilda, you're wrong. It is the most wonderful city in all the world! Of course I'll be safe. I might be a little late, but don't think about it. I shall be with one able to protect me."

HAPPINESS seemed to put silver wings on Myra's twinkling slippers. Across the Seine by taxi, down the Boulevard St. Germain, past the Sorbonne on the Boul' Mich', as the artists called that thoroughfare, and into the fairyland of the lantern-bedecked, narrow street of the cobbles.

An orchestra was playing gay music. A crowd haunted the pavements, where makeshift booths were strewn and games of chance went merrily on. A platform had been erected near the spot where Boris, the Russian wolfhound, had taken refuge from the sticks and stones. On it two absurdly garbed young men were burlesquing a scene from some opera.

Myra, turning into the street, saw only the one who awaited her in a dim doorway. Christopher Dell's hand closed over hers. His voice was low, eager and vibrant.

"I almost thought you were not coming. I have been waiting for years, it seems. Have you had dinner?"

Myra laughed up at him happily.

"No, you told me not to. Were you really waiting so long? As if I would forget our date."

"Come along with me, and we'll feast at Francois' place down the street. Such long French bread. You've never seen its equal, I'll wager. And such wine. Nectar from Olympus!"

When they emerged from the restaurant dancing had started in the street. Myra found herself in Dell's arms. The orchestra played a languorous waltz.

It was only a cobbled street, but to Myra no gleaming ballroom had half its appeal. His arm about her was strong and steady. They had finished a third dance when she happened to glance up and saw what his eyes held. They were like stars, and in that one glance Myra knew the riddle of the night's joy.

Christopher Dell loved her!

Almost simultaneously they were abreast of the wooden door in the wall. He said nothing when they stayed their dancing feet. No words were necessary. Dell opened the door, and in another moment Myra found herself in the courtyard-garden where the lonely tree whispered in the breeze and the starlight fell on the flower borders like minted, shining silver.

Both his arms were about her now. "I have to tell you that I love you—that nothing else in life matters but *you!*"

Through Myra an exquisite thrill of rapture ran like molten fire. Just as she understood that look in his eyes, she knew the meaning of the indefinable emotion that had filled her when she had first met him. She loved him! He was the one whose coming she had awaited all the care-free years of her life. He was the sweetheart of her dreams! In the revelation, the unfolding of love, she moved gladly closer to him.

"I am so happy because you love me, Christopher!"

"You knew it?"

Myra lifted her dreamy gaze. Outside the wall the festival continued its music and laughter. But inside, under the sheltering branches of the dusky tree, the silence was broken only by the beat of their hearts.

"Yes, I knew it—I saw it in your eyes a little while ago. Christopher, you're sure that you love me?"

He held her close and tight. His kiss was ecstasy, a delicious, swooning madness that seemed to steal Myra's reason and to leave in its place a happiness greater than any she had ever known.

"I will always love you! I love you so much that I gladly turn from anything that might take me from you!" His voice held a hushed, solemn note. "I love you, and will follow you to the ends of the earth if necessary! Nothing can mar or destroy this love of mine, Myra!"

The stars seemed to draw closer when their lips met and clung again. The sweetness of that moment was like a symphony in Myra's heart. They might have stood there, close in each other's arms, for all eternity, had not the bang of the door in the wall torn them apart.

"Let's go back and dance again," Myra whispered breathlessly.

"Another waltz," Dell said unsteadily. "I held you in my arms for the first time when we waltzed. I'll get the orchestra leader to play it again."

FOR one enchanted week Myra seemed to live and move through a world that was a blur. Paris seemed in tune with youth, love and romance. Each morning she and Christopher Dell went on little excursions in the funny old dilapidated car that he hired and drove.

They visited Versailles and that place where other lovers, Napoleon and Josephine, had found their own happiness and despair. They took a puffy little steamer down the Seine and sat among the statues of the Luxembourg Gardens. The days merged with each other and vanished. Almost before Myra knew it the week was at an end and there were two letters waiting for her at the hotel when she returned from a dinner engagement with her lover.

One was from Otis Rand, saying he would return to Paris the following Monday. The other was from her mother in Trouville. It suggested that Myra await her father's return, then come with him to the seaside re-

sort for the balance of the month. The letters combined to end some of Myra's happy dreaming. What would her mother and father say when they learned of Christopher Dell?

The stars were bright over the courtyard-garden the following night. There Myra, her golden head on Dell's broad shoulder, told him of her deception and the return of her parents. He listened, touching her smooth cheeks with his lips when she had finished.

"Humble little maid or proud heiress—what does it matter? I love you," he told her, "because you are you! Sweetheart, I have been thinking things over carefully. The time has drawn close to an hour when we must think of the future. I want to marry you at once—to-morrow—and sail with you to America."

Myra trembled.

"I'll marry you when you wish, my darling."

"To-morrow, heart's dearest?"

"Yes, to-morrow. Only—" She raised her head from his shoulder. "Couldn't we wait a few days, until my father and mother come back to Paris?"

His hands over hers were warm and unsteady.

"Believe me, I would wait gladly if it were not for one thing. I must be married by to-morrow to safeguard you, to keep you for myself. As much as I love you, I cannot tell you the reason for it. Myra, love, you must have faith in me!"

His voice and eyes stirred the old ecstasy. Myra clung to him.

"We will be married to-morrow, Christopher. And now," she said softly, "walk back with me to the hotel. It is growing late."

When the door in the wall closed behind them, there was a rustle in the shrubbery back of the tree. Lilas Lescourte stepped out from the deep bank of shadows that had concealed her. She advanced to the center of the courtyard, her lips parted, her black eyes flashing.

For a minute she hesitated with clenched hands. Then on swift feet she let herself out of the courtyard and hailed a taxi on the corner of the Boulevard St. Michel.

"No. 37 Rue Boinnard," she told the driver. "It is across the river. Hurry. Double fare if you drive with speed!"

HER wedding day!

Myra could hardly believe she was the same girl who had come to Paris nine weeks before. The whole city seemed to put on gala dress for the occasion. The sun was never so warm and bright. The streets were never so crowded with happy faces.

In her boudoir, Myra reflected. The man she loved was coming for her at three o'clock. They were to be married in an old church down the Rue Octobre. She would wear her blue frock with the smart silhouette lines and the deep, uneven hem.

After the ceremony they would dine somewhere. Then Dell had promised they would catch the eight o'clock train for Trouville. In fancy, Myra pictured her mother's surprise and happiness. She knew her mother would love Dell, her husband. Her reverie grew pensive. Why had he been so insistent that she marry him to-day? Myra brooded until she remembered he had asked her to believe in him, to have faith. Surely he would tell her everything when he thought best!

Noon came and passed.

It was somewhat after one o'clock, and Myra was considering the matter

of starting to dress when Hilda entered the boudoir carrying a card.

"There is a gentleman who wishes to see you, Miss Myra. I told him I didn't think you would see him, and asked what he wanted. He would not tell me. Here is his card."

Nicholas Prague was the name upon the card. There was a tiny coronet in one corner. She looked across at Hilda.

"Perhaps I'd better see what he wants."

Her visitor was pacing the rug in the parlor of the Rands' suite. He was a very old man with snowy hair, a wrinkled face and shrewd, grave eyes which were mirrors of wisdom. He wore a frock coat, and despite his years, Myra instinctively felt the dignity of him. Without question he was a person of importance.

At her entrance Nicholas Prague swung briskly about. His gaze darted over her rapidly. For a full minute he stared before he waved her into a chair and took up a stand a foot away.

"My dear Miss Rand, you must tell me if I have been misinformed. Am I correct in believing that within an hour or two you are to be married to the man you know only as Christopher Dell?"

Color touched Myra's smooth cheeks.

"How—"

"Please answer my question."

She leaned a little forward, a premonition that all was not well creeping slowly through her.

"Yes—"

The man shook his gray head.

"I am sorry, but it is impossible. This Christopher Dell is not for you!"

Myra jumped up. Somewhere she had heard those same words before. Suddenly she remembered. The anonymous letter she had received the day after she had first met Christopher! Her eyes widened. Was it possible that this man who faced her had been the author of that note? If so, what reason could he possibly have?

"I—I don't understand. What do you mean? Why shouldn't Mr. Dell marry me?"

The shrewd, grave gaze of the other dwelt upon her fully.

"For two good and sufficient reasons. The first is that you are totally unaware of his identity. For you he is willing to destroy his heritage, turn away from duty and flee responsibilities. Would you have a husband who, in the name of love, would do that?"

Each word seemed to strike a hollow blow at Myra's heart.

"Who is Christopher Dell?" she faltered.

Nicholas Prague seemed to square his shoulders.

"He is Prince Bayard Christopher Delcarde, heir to the crown and throne of Marvania. He is to be the next king! He has been here in Paris incognito, playing at art on his holiday. Back there in his homeland his father, the king, lies perilously ill. The prince should have left Paris a week ago. This mad infatuation of his for you kept him here. In vain, I, the minister of state, have pleaded with him. He refuses to listen—for love and you he is throwing away his birthright!"

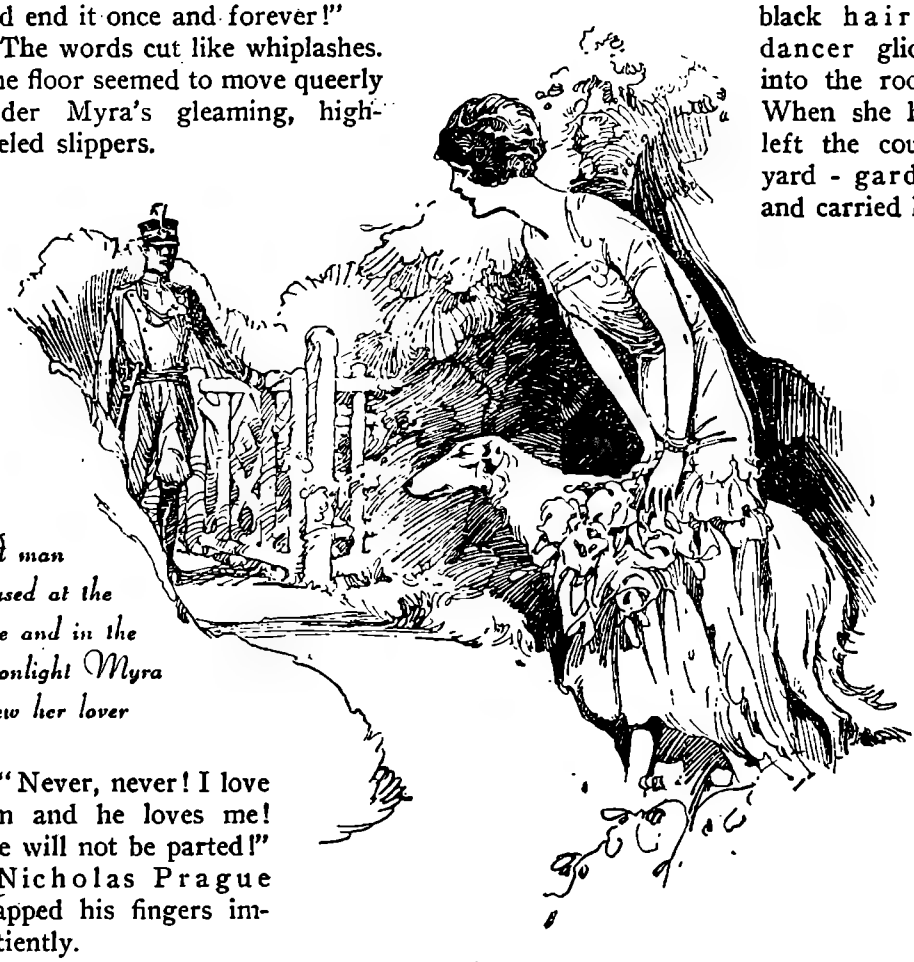
MYRA fell back against the center table in the room. With frightened eyes and parted lips she let the statement echo in her mind like the toll of a great bell. *Prince Bayard!* He was a prince, a prince of Marvania, but also the prince of the kingdom of her heart!

"No, no!" Myra cried in agony. "I

shall not give him up! It cannot be true!"

"You shall give him up! When he comes here at the appointed hour you will refuse to see him! You will send out a note which I shall dictate and end it once and forever!"

The words cut like whiplashes. The floor seemed to move queerly under Myra's gleaming, high-heeled slippers.



A man paused at the gate and in the moonlight Myra knew her lover

"Never, never! I love him and he loves me! We will not be parted!"

Nicholas Prague snapped his fingers impatiently.

"Do you suppose I intend to allow a child like you to upset the destinies of eighty thousand people and leave my country without a ruler should the king pass away? Bah! It is too ridiculous to consider. You scorn my first reason. Perhaps my second will have a different effect!"

He turned toward the door that opened into the public corridor of the hotel. Schooled in the art of diplomacy, wily and shrewd, Nicholas Prague had staked all upon the girl who waited his summons out in the hall. Throwing open the door, he beckoned for Lilas Lescourte to enter.

The beautiful, black haired dancer glided into the room. When she had left the court-yard - garden and carried her information to Prague he had schooled her adroitly in what she was to say and do.

Myra, with a gasp of surprise, looked at Lilas.

"Tell her," Prague said dryly.

The girl walked closer to Myra.

"*Mam'selle,* it was I who wrote that note and signed it *One Who Knows.* Christopher might love you now, but you were not always his choice. Once,"

she said, her rising contralto tones masking the untruth, "he loved *me!* Loved me enough to forget he was a prince and promise to take me back to Marvania with him!"

"I don't believe it!"

Lilas made a wide, passionate gesture.

"Were it not for you we both would be going back to Marvania, Christopher and myself! He to his duty, I to love! But you have come between us! I have watched and I know everything! It is not love, his love is mine—it is only fascination! You will do as this gentleman asks—you will give Christopher back to Marvania and to me!"

"And—and if I refuse to give him up?" Myra asked in a dull, colorless voice.

Lilas delved a swift hand in under the embroidered peasant blouse she wore. With a mirthless laugh she plucked out a small, gleaming dagger.

"If you do not give him up, then I swear I will kill myself before your eyes! You shall have your sweetheart, but only over my cold dead body! Now—choose!"

She raised the knife on high.

For one wild, tormented second Myra imagined the girl did not intend to await her answer. With an inarticulate cry of hopeless despair she threw her arms wide.

"Stop! Wait! I—I will give him up!" she choked, her eyes blinded with stinging unshed tears.

A silence followed Myra's ringing cry. From the street outside there came the sound of shouting. A newsboy was calling out the importance of a special bulletin. Nicholas Prague moved swiftly to a window and flung it wide.

The shouting grew louder and more distinct. After a long interval Myra, crushed and beaten, recognized the words of the news vendor.

"Special bulletin!" was the cry. "The King of Marvania is dead!"

IT was toward the last of the month that Otis Rand joined Myra and her mother at breakfast, a sheaf of papers in his hand.

"We leave for the Balkans on the six o'clock express," he announced. "The mining matters have been put in contract form and await my signature in Marvania. Another thing. We'll arrive in time for Coronation Day. The little country crowns a new king, you know."

Mrs. Rand looked anxiously across the table at Myra. For two weeks Myra had been very ill. Her secret and her love were locked away in the treasure chest of her heart. Not even her parents suspected it was the death of love that had placed her upon a sick bed from which she had arisen a pale, wan ghost of herself.

"Do you suppose Myra is equal to the trip? You know," Mrs. Rand reminded her husband, "we sail from Cherbourg for home on the fifteenth."

Marvania! Coronation Day! A sudden wave of expectancy lightened Myra's sadness. To see the one who had called himself Christopher Dell for the last time! Just to see him riding past—one more memory to add to the dear trove of those even time could not rob her of!

"Mother, I want to go! I'm sure it would do me a lot of good!"

Otis Rand nodded.

"Nothing like a change to benefit you. Besides, you'll only have to stay a few days. I'll reserve compartments on the Eastern Express immediately."

It was six o'clock exactly when they left the Gare de Lyon, the big Paris

station. In her own compartment, Myra wondered if she had done a wise thing. The wound in her heart would never heal. Why risk new torment? Marvania's Coronation Day would be the last chapter in the book of her happiness and bleak despair.

Yet, some power seemed to urge her on. To see Christopher once more before the book was closed for all time. To look upon him and to know that he had loved her and she him, that she would love him all the rest of her life, held a promise greater than dread of the future.

While the express raced through the darkness, she lay awake. Her mind roamed back over those days in Paris.

She thought of her wedding afternoon. Nicholas Prague had dictated that last letter with artful cunning. Myra had no clear recollection of what she had written. She only remembered Hilda coming into the bedroom where she lay, grief-stricken and feverish, to tell her Christopher Dell would not leave until he saw her. She had not seen him, and he had left toward twilight. After that there was a fortnight's blank, filled with varied impressions. Recollections of a sick room, of the muted voice of Paris, anguish and the dim figures of a doctor, nurse, her father and mother moving through an aching void.

It was long past midnight when Myra finally slept. . . .

SHE awoke to find she had invaded a world of mountains. Gaspard, the capital city of Marvania, lay colorful and picturesque in the serene morning sunshine. A carriage took them to the hotel, a quaint little inn hidden away around the corner of a main thoroughfare. Myra rode down streets gay with flags and bunting and saw that the city was crowded with Marvanians dressed in native finery.

"I think it's delightfully interesting," Mrs. Rand murmured. "And you, Myra?"

With an effort Myra removed her sad blue eyes from the distant loom of a white palace.

"I love it," she replied simply.

Her father lighted a fresh cigar.

"We'll have to hurry. The coronation procession begins at noon sharp, I'm told. Of course, we can't actually get in the palace to see the ceremony there, but we'll be able to have a good look at the new king as he passes by. Too bad about Crown Prince Otto. If he hadn't gone on that African expedition Otto would have been ruler to-day and not Bayard."

There was a little garden back of the hotel bright with flowers. The window of Myra's room looked down over it. She caught their elusive perfume while she changed from traveling dress to a more appropriate costume. Eleven o'clock came, and, with her mother and father, she joined the throng in the street. All along the main thoroughfare the crowd had collected, but near a triumphal arch there was still room on the curb for a good view of the proceedings.

Myra sat down on the folding camp chair Otis Rand arranged for her. The sun was warm on her wan, pretty face. Waiting was of no importance. This looking for the last time upon the one she loved was almost like a duty that she could not escape.

Suddenly there came the blare of silver bugles. A murmur ran through the crowd, a tense movement that found an answer in the throb of Myra's pulses. She jumped up eagerly.

A regiment of cavalry rode into view. They were scarlet coated and

were mounted upon restive steeds. They marched past, and then band music aroused the crowd to cheering. After the band a corps of mountaineers with their packs and guns slung on their backs filed past. Then Myra glimpsed an open brougham guarded by four white-coated, helmeted horsemen with drawn swords.

She thought she would faint, but her vision cleared as the carriage drew closer. It contained two people. One was Nicholas Prague and the other, Myra saw with a bursting heart, was Prince Bayard, the next King of Marvania!

With nerve-racking solemnity the brougham approached and drew abreast of her. Myra involuntarily stepped out from the curb before she remembered, and checked herself. Dimly she saw the one she loved rise a little from the carriage seat and strain forward. The old man beside him dropped a quick hand to his arm; the carriage went past to a fresh roar of cheering.

Behind her, Myra heard her mother speaking.

"What a fine-looking young man! He's every inch a king!"

"Well, I guess that's all," Otis Rand put in. "Might as well get back to the hotel. All right, Myra?"

Myra opened her closed eyes and forced an answering smile. She had had her last look. It was over now.

TWILIGHT tiptoed down from the mountains, bringing a spicy coolness. Near the palace they were celebrating with music and song. Myra, awaking after her nap, heard the distant echoes.

Now, she felt, she could face the future with more calm. The anguish would diminish little by little, leaving her rapture to remember and, as the years went by, the memory of first love would grow hallowed, wondrous. She bathed her eyes and cheeks, put on a dinner frock and then recalled the flowers in the garden.

A door from the hotel led down a flagged path and through to the garden by means of a rustic gate. Myra stopped to listen to the quiet splash of a waterfall. A spreading tree grew in the south corner of the garden. Its friendly branches were very much like those of a tree in a Paris courtyard. She gathered a few fragrant flowers, heard a soft patter and turned in time to glimpse an intruder. A magnificent Russian wolfhound had pushed the gate open and trotted across to her.

"Boris!" Myra gasped. "Oh, Boris!"

She dropped the flowers and put both arms around the dog's neck. Had Boris found her to connect the past and the present? Unshed tears filled her blue eyes. The dog nuzzled her as if remembering she had once been his rescuer. Then he barked madly.

"Boris! Silence!"

The rustic garden gate creaked. Myra straightened up and fell back, one hand pressed tightly over her thudding heart.

A man had come into the garden, and in the light of the rising moon Myra saw it was the one who had ridden past her that afternoon in the open brougham.

"Christopher!"

His arms went about her. His kiss woke her red lips to life and animation.

"Sweetheart, I have come for you —at last!"

Myra, like one in a golden dream, touched his cheek with her finger tips. Were they, after all, to know one more hour together?

"Come for me?" she repeated, awed.

He held her to his heart.

"Haven't you heard the news? The whole city is afire with it!"

Myra shook her head.

"I slept all afternoon. Then I came straight down here. I—I have heard nothing. What has happened?"

He laughed joyously.

"The most wonderful thing that could possibly happen. Otto, my brother, has been found, alive and well, in the jungle! Word came just before the crowning ceremony. Instead of my being ruler of Marvania, Otto will be king. You see?"

Myra held her flushed cheek against his.

"And you, dearest? What will you do?"

Her Prince kissed her again.

"I talked it over with old Nicholas. What will I do? Nothing—except have him confess to you how he arranged for the girl Lilas to lie! Nothing except to marry you tomorrow morning and sail back to America with you! I have exchanged this kingdom for another—the kingdom of our love! My darling, my life is yours and I claim your life in love's exchange. For always our love shall last!"

Gift Supreme

I BROUGHT my love a wan star
On a night in May,
But she only laughed at me,
As she turned away.

I brought my love the pale moon
On a night in June,
And her eyes were pools of light,
As she hummed a tune.

I brought my love a white dream
As the dusk came down,
But I caught her mournful sigh
And her rustling gown.

I brought my love my glad heart
And my lips to kiss,
Then she murmured, "Dear lad,
We have found all bliss!"

—Edgar Daniel Kramer.

Apart

Though riches beckoned and grandeur separated two loving hearts, the little god of love was watching—

By Nella Mae Esty

"H-H-HOWARD WILTON!" she said breathlessly.

"Rosemary Ennerdale Lee! You've known this was coming, haven't you?"

"Howard Wilton!"

"Surprised?"

A palpitating silence. Then she said:

"No—but—but—I guess—maybe I thought—"

"Go on. Don't stop. Maybe you thought what?"

She laughed daringly, lowered her heavily fringed eyes, brought their violet, liquid light shyly to his again. And she wiggled her hand in a contented little squeeze where Howard's iron grip held hers under the little table where they were having ices in a corner of the huge Casino ballroom.

"I kind of thought maybe it was all on my side, Howard. I knew I had it. But I thought you were—kidding me along."

For a terrible moment Howard had a fearful realization of what he was doing. There was his mother and his sister, who would raise the deuce about Rosemary! But here was this bewildering little auburn-haired child-woman, her whole being only too obviously ready to yield itself to him.

When he spoke, his tone and manner had altered. However hard it was, every minute of this sort of mush would make it infinitely worse.

"Why shouldn't I kid you along?" he said. He had spoken jestingly, but he could see that she was deadly hurt.

She arranged her silvern scarf about her shoulders and drew herself up, saying in a composed, cold voice:

"You must take me home now, Howard. My folks will be wild if I'm out very late."

Howard felt a chill pang quite as definite as her own.

"Rosemary, listen. Don't talk like that! I—I—like you a lot. You're so young—such a baby thing."

"I'm nineteen—and I'm not a baby at all," she replied, with haughty dignity.

"Listen, Rosemary! Listen, darling."

She would not even pause to catch her breath.

"Since last July," she went on, "it's been you, Howard, just you."

He caught her small, agitated hands, held them tightly, and looked at her. His handsome bronzed face was very tender—very affectionate. His brown eyes glowed.

"Oh, Rosemary, sweetheart, you little infant—I—I—"

"*Howard!*"

Howard gasped. His sister, Mildred Wilton, had laid her cold hand on his shoulder.

"Howard," she repeated, "I want to speak to you."

"I'm awfully sorry, Mil, but I can't come now," began Howard.

Mildred gave Rosemary a disdainful glance, then said, imperiously: "I shall be in the lounge." Without the slightest recognition of Rosemary, whom she had known since childhood, she passed on.

Rosemary turned crimson and her eyes flashed dangerously. Howard was white with shame, and they were both trembling as he led Rosemary outside to where his roadster was parked. He tucked her into the car, saying: "You won't mind, darling? I will be back in a few minutes."

Rosemary did not answer, but the moment Howard was out of sight, she sprang out of the car. Shaken and white, she held her head high, her little fists knotted into tight little balls.

"The snob!" she gasped through choking rage, "the she-cat! I'm through with them, through with all of them forever!" Hot tears blinded her as she hurriedly picked her way through parked cars and dark little streets on her way home.

WHEN Howard reached the lounge he found his sister with her friends, smoking their cigarettes. Mildred beckoned him over to her, introduced the one stranger, a stunning girl in black velvet, and gayly announced that she wanted a little chat with her brother.

She went close to him and lowered her voice:

"How can you be so mad as to parade that shop-girl right under our noses? Every one knows she has no family backing, while you are a Wilton, one of the Wiltons. Really, Howard, you ought to know better."

Howard was pale with fury.

"Look here, Mil, let Rosemary alone. You know very well her own mother was of noble birth."

"Pooh. That's all rot! No one believes that story for a minute. She's just an ordinary little waif."

"She's the girl I love and she's going to become my wife, if she can be persuaded to have me."

"My stars! You're a bigger fool than I thought! You'll ruin your future prospects, your social position, everything. Worrying mother and losing your friends for the sake of this wretched little nobody whose father is a street-sweeper."

"I cannot discuss the matter with you." Howard rose to his feet. "I must go now. Good-night." He nodded to Mildred's friends and left.

THE Lee cottage stood between flimsy apartment houses at the very top of a steep little city street that overlooked Monterey Bay. The crimson glory of the setting sun flashed from the cottage windows, streaking the sidewalk with glowing shadows. It was a meek little dwelling, but the daintily curtained bay window suggested cheer and hominess. Sprays of red roses rambled over a green trellis; bright, colorful abalone shells, inverted to border a path, were fringed with a hedge of calla lilies.

Rosemary listlessly dragged her feet, usually dancing with life, up the walk and passed into the cottage.

Mrs. Lee, a round, sweet-faced little woman, looked at the drooping figure sharply.

"Tired, dearie?"

"Yes, the whole town seemed to turn out to-day. Hoyt's had a sale."

Rosemary stepped into her tiny bedroom, just off the kitchen, and slipped off her navy blue flannel dress. She reappeared in a crisp gingham, then gathered up the knives and forks preparatory to setting the table for supper.

"It's all off with Howard and me," she informed Mrs. Lee.

Her foster mother finished measuring the coffee into the pot before she replied:

"It's just as well. You are too good for him, anyway, my dear. I have a great surprise for you." Mrs. Lee was shaking.

Rosemary looked at her in astonishment. She had thought her mother would be disappointed. "News?"

"Yes. Some one from the Chamber of Commerce called to see me to-day. They wanted all the details of your adoption. It seems that your mother's people in Scotland have been trying for years to locate you."

Rosemary let the silver slip from her cold fingers and it fell to the floor with a clatter.

"My mother's people! My mother's people?"

"Yes, your grandfather Ennerdale has forgiven your dead mother for marrying an American and is ready to receive you and settle his estates upon you, his daughter's child."

"My heavens— Mums!" Rosemary cried. "Well, he can keep his estates. He tried to break my poor little mother and when she was widowed and crushed by the earthquake he refused to let her bring her baby home because she and her child were Americans! And now! Now! He wants me, wants to take me away from the only love I ever had: you and my dada Lee! Huh!"

Mrs. Lee's eyes filled with tears and Rosemary sprang to her side, kissing her round cheeks, holding her close in her young arms. Then she remembered Howard and the old ache in her heart returned. Her eyes suddenly glinted as she thought of Mildred Wilton.

"But— Mums, maybe, after all, I'd better go. But I'll come back to you."

Then she told Mrs. Lee about the night before, about the snubs she had received from Howard's set.

"So Mildred Wilton snubbed you?" Mrs. Lee laughed. "Wait till she hears your news!"

Rosemary was human enough to picture the consternation her inheritance would bring to some of the people who had been hateful to her.

Mrs. Lee suddenly caught Rosemary to her heart.

"Dear little girl," she faltered, "your grandfather Ennerdale has set a condition: that you marry an Englishman or Scotchman and never return to America!"

Mildred burst into the room. "Howard!" she cried. "Have you seen this?"

Rosemary paled.

"Mums, Howard loves me—I know he loves me, but I know too that he is afraid of his sister. I can't marry him if he is going to be influenced like that, but it's Howard or no one for me. Did he phone to-day?"

Mrs. Lee shook her head and led Rosemary to a bright, cretonne covered couch where they sat down.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," Rosemary continued. "I'll write Howard a line before this news gets out and I'll put it up to him, give him a final choice; he must be all for me and me alone, or he's to stick to his own set and let me alone forever. It will test his love. If he turns me down, now, before he knows the truth about me, then I'll leave for Scotland and by and by I'll marry some Highland laddie. But, mark me, mums, when I get settled you and dadda are going to come and live in a castle with me, and we'll be happy as any Scots."

It sounded so absurd that they both burst out laughing. Rosemary sprang to her feet, her gorgeous auburn hair glinting in the light, her large eyes, so ready to reflect anger or delight, dancing with impish mockery, as she bowed with a comical gesture of disdain before her mother.

Then big Jack Lee bustled in, tired and hungry. The two women exchanged glances for silence. No need to worry dadda with such matters until the thing was settled. And deep in the heart of Rosemary, she knew How-

ard would not actually give her up. She felt sure of him, somehow.

LATE that night Rosemary wrote her letter and hurried down the hill to a letter box to mail it. "Oh, boy, dear," she whispered, "my life, my very soul is in your hands now. Which will it be? Well, the next twenty-four hours will tell the story."

If Rosemary could have known that Howard was out of town, could have seen the gloating satisfaction with which Mildred read the letter and then destroyed it, it might have changed her whole destiny.

But Rosemary didn't know.

All morning she waited upon customers, her heart sinking as the hours rolled by and there was no sign of Howard. Somehow she got through it and went racing home at noon. Of course he'd call her there. How stupid of her to expect him to seek her out at the store!

Her heart was pounding when she opened the door of her home.

"Any phone calls for me, mums?"

She knew instantly, from the anguish in her mother's eyes. There had been no calls, no message for her. He would get that letter before he left for the bank, where he worked. He always had got them before.

"If he doesn't call by four thirty this afternoon, mums, I'm going to send that cable to Scotland." Her voice broke in a sob. "After he hears the news about me it will be too late. I couldn't take him then, not if he begged me on his knees. I couldn't love a coward and a snob!"

Rosemary went through agonizing hours of waiting as the afternoon rolled by, waiting with a tortured heart, hoping, praying that the boy she loved would be man enough to claim her just as she was, plain Rosemary Ennerdale Lee.

At five o'clock, shaken but resolute, she sent her cable to her grandfather in Scotland.

Then she collapsed.

AT six o'clock Howard drove up to the mansion he knew as home.

"Any mail for me, sis? Any phone calls? Did Rosemary call me to-day?"

Mildred, assuming unconcern, shook her head. "No, nothing, no call."

Howard felt oddly shaken. It was not like Rosemary to hold a grudge. He must somehow make this up to her. Yet—hang it! How was he to go about it and still keep peace in his own family? He loved her, wanted her, but he knew she had pride too. Mentally he shook himself. But he could not shake away his ache for the girl. He went to the phone and called her. Ah, at last she answered. How heavenly sweet to hear her voice!

"Hullo—honey!"

"Don't waste your time, Howard," Rosemary answered, sharply. "I am leaving for Europe next week."

"What? Well, I'm going to Africa myself to get thawed out, after that tone of yours!"

"Don't pretend you don't know what I'm talking about."

"I don't understand!"

"I fell for that once, Howard, but this time I'm wide awake. Good-by!"

Rosemary hung up the receiver, then buried her head in Mrs. Lee's lap. She thought her heart would break.

Howard was bewildered, stunned. "What can she be driving at?" he mused.

Mildred burst into the room — her face white, her eyes wild and frightened.

"Howard! Look at this headline." She thrust the *Evening News* into Howard's face. "Rosemary Lee has been called to Scotland as heir to her grandfather's castle and estates. Oh, if I could have known!"

Howard snatched at the paper, his hands trembling.

"Lady Rosemary Ennerdale," he read. "I've lost her forever! She'd never believe in my love now. Never! It's too late! Why didn't I call her from San Francisco as I wanted to—why didn't I—"

With a groan he fell into a chair and buried his face on his outstretched arms.

Mildred, in a frenzy of fear and guilty regret as she thought of the letter she had stolen and destroyed, left him to bear his anguish alone. She was too much of a coward to tell her brother of what she had done, too much of a coward to face Rosemary with the truth. But she knew that as long as she lived she would bear the whiplash of a guilty conscience. Her secret would go with her to the grave.

THERE was a good deal of commotion at the little country station of Craigiefoot; the early morning train from Carlisle was drawing slowly in. Outside in the sunshine a big car was throbbing and snorting; inside a footman in the handsome green and gold Ennerdale livery was rushing down the platform to the first-class carriages. Before he could reach the door one was flung open and young Lord Wye, a handsome, fair-haired Englishman, sprang out.

The man touched his hat.

"Good morning, my lord. The car is waiting. I will find your valet and see to the luggage and your gun cases."

"I've no man," said the traveler, a tall figure in tweed clothes and soft felt hat, "and no guns and very little luggage. There is an easel though, and a rug; a portmanteau is behind in the van and that's all."

The footman was well-trained; his face remained impassive. But inwardly he marveled that a nobleman should look like a tourist or artist, and arrive on the moors in September without guns or attendants.

Lord Wye always declared it was a blessing that he was so ordinary and undistinguished in appearance. He could do anything and go anywhere; no one dreamt he was anything but a young man with artistic tendencies.

He had been traveling all night. He stood for a few minutes outside the little Scotch station drawing in deep breaths of pure country air before entering the motor that was to take him to Castle Kelvers, distant five miles or so, in time for breakfast. In the car, he sat bending forward, gazing out at the wild moors and their background of blue hills, clothed with purple patches of heather and golden splashes of gorse. He hadn't seen the country since he was a boy.

The car did the distance in a surprisingly short time. It turned into the tall iron gates, and passed through a long avenue of firs up to the castle, a stately old building in gray stone, with turrets and ramparts, partially surrounded by a moat, standing out clearly in the bright sunshine. The doors stood open, and a group of people were waiting on the steps to greet him.

Lord Ennerdale, an elderly man with snow-white hair, came down to the car accompanied by two hounds, barking and shouting a hearty welcome. His sister, Lady Bagot, and his niece, Mabel Dunraine, with several others, were standing in the open doorway with a

tall, lovely girl, whose bright smiling face and crimson tam o'shanter cap appealed to his artistic eye.

She was introduced as Lady Rosemary Ennerdale, granddaughter of the old man. The four men behind, in shooting garb with guns, were the Earl of Dunraine, Wye's brother-in-law, Viscount Glengyle; Walter Seton, a friend, and a brother officer of his, named Donald McAllister.

THERE was a perfect babel of voices and the barking of dogs. The men were just starting on a shooting excursion. Lord Ennerdale wished to stop behind and see to the comfort of his guest and favorite nephew, but Geoffrey Wye refused to allow it.

"Nonsense! You be off to your sport," he said. "I shall be far better with the ladies, though I'm dirty and hungry."

"You must be. Come to breakfast directly," Lady Rosemary exclaimed, but her cousin protested he must make himself presentable first.

A watchful footman took charge of him and conducted him to his room in the tower.

When he appeared in the dining room only Lady Rosemary and Mabel Dunraine were there. Geoffrey Wye attacked his breakfast with hearty appetite. While he ate he asked for all the news, stealing glances of admiration at Rosemary all the while.

"I hope you won't be dull here," observed Mabel. "There isn't much going on except shooting parties, and those would not interest you as you don't shoot."

"I'll be perfectly happy roaming over these moors, and painting your glens and hills," retorted her uncle. "Then I can fish and play golf, also."

"Lady Rosemary will be delighted to show you all the best spots for painting. She loves to tramp, too, so you will have company."

Geoffrey's face beamed as he turned to Rosemary.

"You made a delicious bit of color standing against those gray pillars in that red cap and plaid skirt."

"That is my tartan. You will get used to kilts, plaids and Scotch bonnets here. We are all immensely patriotic in bonnie Scotland. It is grandfather's wish."

GEOFFREY WYE made himself at home everywhere. The ladies were all busy, so he walked up the hill to see the view. He did not see the hunters till five o'clock tea. This meal was always served in the great hall, a huge, oak-paneled, raftered place, whose walls were decorated with armor and old weapons, and in whose square fireplaces logs burned with a cheerful glow. Tall screens of stamped leather shut off all drafts, and armchairs were drawn up round the fire.

Sir Walter Seton and young McAllister came in together. The baronet managed to get a chair behind Lady Rosemary, who nodded to him brightly.

"Had good sport?" she asked.

"Pretty fair. The birds were a bit wild. It was misty over the hills. Glengyle fell into a bog—sticky, soft, black mud. They are scraping him clean."

Rosemary laughed, and Lord Wye watched them chattering together. With sudden and deadly swiftness he had fallen in love with this delightful girl. He had never before desired to marry and he was twenty-seven years old.

There was a great babel of voices

and Lord Wye, always quiet, sat in a corner listening to the lively chatter. They were discussing Lord Glengyle's accident with peals of laughter. Lord Ennerdale was enjoying himself immensely. Suddenly the old man scowled. Sir Walter had asked Rosemary some question about America. There was a tension in the air while young McAllister kicked Walter on the shins. Quick to catch the situation, Wye challenged Sir Walter to a game of billiards, and they walked off to the long billiard room in the modern wing of the castle.

In the middle of the game, McAllister looked in.

"Oh, I say, Mac, what made you kick my shins in that beastly manner?"

"You are a thundering idiot, Seton. Ennerdale is a bit insane on the subject of America. It's taboo around here."

"How was I to know?" retorted the other indignantly. "I have heard the story of Lady Rosemary's mother, of course, and naturally supposed—"

"Don't go talking about it here, that's all!"

"Of course, of course! I'll be discreet! That poor girl must get horribly homesick, however. I saw tears in her eyes when I mentioned America."

As Mabel had told Geoffrey, the other men were out shooting from breakfast till five o'clock tea-time. But Wye protested he had a delightful time of it. He had prevailed upon Rosemary to take him out sketching and show him the most picturesque spots.

Wye had been there about a week and they had grown rather close through their tramps over the hills together and their secret talks about Rosemary's beloved country.

"I'm an undistinguished ordinary fellow," he said one morning, as he sat among the bracken fern, making a sketch of the Fisherman's pool. Rosemary sat near, watching him intently.

"Are you ordinary?" she asked, thinking of the Wiltons at home. "You have seen all the wonderful sights of which one reads. I like to hear you talk."

"You are awfully kind," Geoffrey answered, seriously. "But I've wasted a lot of time, and opportunity, too. If I had been a poor man with my way to make and my living to earn, I might have been a real artist."

"Why can't you do it now?"

Geoffrey laid down his pencil and sat still, gazing at the bright auburn head. Rosemary had flung her Scotch Glengarry cap on the fern beside her, and was busy getting out plates and unfastening packages of eatables.

She glanced up.

"Now, drop your sketching," she said, "lunch is ready."

Geoffrey jumped up obediently, caught up her plaid, spread it out on the ground and surveyed the feast with satisfaction.

"Can't I help?" he said. "What's in those bottles? Ginger-beer? I'll uncork one."

"We have home-brewed beer at home. Do you care for beer?"

"I like coffee or lemon drinks best. I've lived a good deal in the East, you see."

"Tell me about Cairo. You were there last winter, were you not?"

"Yes, and Japan, too." Wye obligingly began to describe the deserts and tombs at Luxor, and a garden fête at Tokio, while the girl listened.

"I should love to travel," she said at last with a little sigh.

"Why don't you, then?"

"Because granddad loves Scotland

and sport. He has no one but me. Our cousins, including yourself, do not come often. I could not leave him long; he seems to go to pieces if I do."

Rosemary screamed. There in the shadows a man's head appeared!

At last they were finished and Geoffrey rose to his feet. Lifting his soft felt hat with one hand, he held the other to the girl and helped her to her feet. Clasping her warm white fingers in his own, he stooped his handsome head and kissed her hand, gravely, reverently.

His gray eyes were full of eloquence as he half whispered: "If all women were good and sweet like you, Rosemary, dear, this world would be better and the men nobler than they are now. I love you deeply. Would you do me the honor of becoming my wife?"

Rosemary was startled, but she smiled affectionately at her cousin. How different, how strange all this life seemed! Even love took the shape of formality. A picture flashed across her mind—the picture of a boy and a girl gripping hands under a table.

She bit her lip to stifle a sob. "Dear Geoffrey, give me time to think it over, will you? It is rather sudden, you know."

The man stooped to kiss her forehead. They walked side by side, saying little, but both of them were lost in deep thought. They would never

forget this hour, whatever the outcome was to be.

WHEN Rosemary and Geoffrey returned to the castle, they found considerable commotion. The servants were agitated, the guests embarrassed. Lord Ennerdale was shaking like a leaf, his face scarlet with rage.

"I'll have no foreigners on my premises," he stormed as he coiled a long snake-whip in his agitated hand.

Rosemary ran to his side. "Why, granddad! What is troubling you?"

"Rose, Rosemary, my child," he panted, "promise me you will never leave me. I am a very lonely old man."

Rosemary began to croon to him as a mother comforts a child.

"I'll tell you a secret," she whispered. "Geoffrey has asked me to be his wife."

Lord Ennerdale's face lit up with smiling delight. "Ah, I had hoped for that," he murmured, gleefully. "Now you shall have the famous Ennerdale emeralds."

The tension was broken and every one began to talk at once, filling the great hall with a babel of voices.

"You're a genius, Rosemary," Mabel whispered later. "Every one is deadly afraid of Lord Ennerdale's tempers."

"What was it all about?" Rosemary asked.

"An American chap was here, looking for you."

"What? What was he like?" Rosemary cried, shaking Mabel till her teeth chattered. She had completely forgotten herself.

"I—I only caught a glimpse of him," she replied, astonished, "but he seemed to be lean and tall and rather dark."

"Oh, I can't stand it," Rosemary moaned. "I never dreamed that grandfather would carry his clannishness that far. That was Howard, I know that was Howard! Tell them I've gone to my rooms."

The girl wrung her hands, completely unnerved. She locked herself into her chamber, then flung herself across her huge, canopied bed in an agony of weeping.

Rosemary had been at Castle Kelvers a year and, after many blunders, had managed to compress her buoyant personality into the rigid, formal life her grandfather demanded. She was miserably, hopelessly unhappy, and she realized that she had made a terrible mistake. All the dull splendor of life in a castle could not compare with home, where there was warmth and freedom and love. She felt that her present existence was crushing her in soul and body.

THERE came a sudden, stealthy sound from her window. Rosemary raised her head from the pillow, her eyes wide, her heart pounding. Perhaps the old castle was haunted. She heard strange things—

Sh— It sounded like some one breathing, heavily, eerie, awful. She clutched the bed-coverlet in terror.

The window suddenly swung open and Rosemary screamed, for a man's head was bobbing there in the dusky light.

"Rosemary!"

The whisper seemed to fill the room.

With a cry, Rosemary slid off the bed and flew to the window just as the tall, lean youth with brown eyes and dark hair, bounded into the chamber.

There was a double cry of "Rosemary!" and "Howard!" and then the two were in each other's arms!

"I had to come, darling—I couldn't live any longer without you. Mildred told me at last about the letter she destroyed. I really didn't know!"

The girl said only, "Howard—Howard—Howard!"

Howard gazed at her face with hungry eyes and devoured her sweet lips with his own.

Rosemary could scarcely speak:

"How did you get up here? How did you know which room was mine?"

"Oh, a friendly chap out there among the heather heard my tale of woe and put me wise. There's an old ladder running up this wall, hidden by the ivy. Come, hurry into your duds. I've come to take you home."

"I couldn't do that! It wouldn't be fair to grandfather nor Geoffrey."

"Oh, yes, you can and will. I don't leave this place without you! Get that? And I'll give you three minutes to go peacefully or—"

"Or what?"

"I'll make you."

The laughter had left his eyes leaving them grim and determined.

Rosemary tossed her head. "I can't be a quitter after all grandfather's kindness."

"Look at those welts on my arms and neck, welts from your grandfather's whip. Do you call that kindness? You have one minute left."

There came a sudden, loud pounding on Rosemary's door.

"Rosemary, open at once!" the angry voice of Lord Ennerdale commanded.

Rosemary quaked. "In a moment, granddad," she replied with a shiver.

A bound, and Howard grabbed up a cloak and enveloped Rosemary in it. Then he darted to the window. She did not try to resist. Agonizing moments were spent in getting their feet placed on the old ladder. Step by step, they let themselves down from the perilous heights to the ground below.

The hounds began to bark, there were shouts, but the two fleeing figures dashed down the avenue of firs. They reached the iron gates. A throbbing motor stood there. In the driver's seat sat Geoffrey Wye.

Rosemary drew back with a cry, but Howard lifted her bodily and thrust her into the car. With a roar the motor started.

"Howard! Stop!" she screamed. "That man at the wheel is Geoffrey Wye, the man who has asked me to be his wife."

"That's all right, dearest. That's the fellow who told me about the ladder that was hidden in the ivy!"

Rosemary collapsed into hysterical sobbing, collapsed into arms that were tender and strong and comforting, while the motor rushed on on its way to Craigiefoot and the station.

Howard smiled happily, secretly, for there was a surprise waiting for Rosemary at Craigiefoot. A surprise that would make her happiness overflow with joy. Mother and Dadda Lee were waiting there, waiting for their own Rosemary Ennerdale Lee. And with them was—a marriage license!

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She sprang into the ditch — just in time

Where Love Lives

Why did she fear the man to whom she gave her promise? She never knew until—

By Adelaide Humphries

CHARMAIN stumbled along the dark road, half walking, half running. She did not know where she was or where she was going. Reason seemed to have left her bewildered brain after that terrible scene from which she was running away, driven by fear. Fear that clutched at her heart . . . that almost paralyzed her beyond motion for a moment, when, glancing back over her shoulder she saw two tiny lights flash over the hill, bob into sight again, grow large and round as they neared.

For a moment only she was paralyzed, then she started to run as swiftly as her aching feet would carry her, but realizing the futility of that, she

summoned all her strength and courage and sprang from the side of the road down into a deep ditch, landing in a crumpled little heap, with a sharp twist of pain. Landing just in time. In another moment the lights, powerful and searching now, flashed by.

She had not been mistaken. It was Whittier's car. He had turned back, had followed, was trying to find her. She shivered, then realized she was safe, for a time at least. The big car was a tiny speck far down the road.

She waited a while longer, then tried to pull herself to her feet, but with a gasp of pain sank onto her knees again. She had done something to her ankle when she had taken that desperate leap.

What to do now?

She could not lie there, shivering with fear and cold, through the long night. She could not call for help, since there was no one within miles and miles to hear her call. She could not go on.

Suppose some one was following Whittier; suppose they found her? No, she couldn't stay where she was and face that. Face, too, the thoughts that tore at her memory, the ghastly scene that her mind's eye could not erase.

By sheer force of will, somehow, she managed to drag herself up onto the roadway—to crawl a few feet, waiting to gather strength to try again, the weight and agony in her ankle becoming more unbearable with each move, until she could go no further, but collapsed into unconsciousness.

"DON'T be frightened," some one said, a low, kind voice close to her ear, as consciousness flooded back into her being and she opened her eyes once more. "Don't try to sit up—don't move—I'll carry you." And two strong arms lifted her lightly, gently, two strong legs strode along as though unaware of her weight.

Charmain didn't try to struggle or move. It was too blessed to be carried along, to be freed from effort and pain, just to relax and give herself up to this strength.

What did it matter where she was being carried, who was carrying her, what would happen next?

"I live up this lane," the man said, "so I am taking you there. The nearest village is almost sixteen miles away. You are not much to carry, but I doubt if I could carry you that far!" He laughed. "You must not be afraid."

"I'm not afraid," Charmain answered.

Indeed, she did not feel afraid now—not of anything—certainly not of this strong man with the kind voice and friendly laugh. She did not feel afraid of the car that had flashed by while she lay in the ditch—or of the man in the car, or of those who might be following, or even of the thing that had driven her alone into the night.

The man did not say another word until they reached the door of the farmhouse. He opened it, carried her in and placed her carefully on a couch.

"Now," he said briskly, "I'll build a fire. I see you're chilled through. Then we'll take a look at your leg—it *is* your leg that's been hurt, isn't it?"

"My ankle, I think," Charmain said. "At first the pain was there. Although afterward it seemed to spread until my whole leg hurt. But now, when I lie perfectly still, it is not so bad."

"Good! You must lie still, then. Don't try to move or talk until I have

a fire. I'll put the teakettle on, too. Oh, we'll warm you up in a jiffy now!"

Charmain smiled gratefully and did as she was bid, lay still without moving or speaking—watching him as he laid wood in the fireplace and coaxed a tiny blaze, gathered more wood, strode into an adjoining room from which she could hear the sound of dishes and pans, came back to pull a small table close to the blaze that was leaping and dancing brightly, throwing out a rosy golden warmth over the room.

Charmain saw that it was a small room, rather bare, but scrupulously clean, a room used for sleeping, dining and living all in one. She saw that this man was young, as well as strong and kind. A tall, square shouldered fellow with skin tanned from exposure to all sorts of weather, a stubble of beard on his face, an untidy mop of corn-colored hair.

Not a handsome man, exactly, yet with something fine about his face, his blue eyes, the swing of every movement he made.

She saw that he wore a warm flannel shirt, now that he had thrown aside his coat, and rough breeches that reached to his knees, and heavy socks and sturdy high boots. A farmer, no doubt. Was this his house? Did he live here all alone?

She did not ask these questions, or any others that popped into her mind. What right had she to ask questions of him, when he had even more right to question her?

BUT he did not ask any questions of her. He lifted her into a big chair pulled close to the fire. He knelt at her feet and drew down her stocking and examined the swelling, darkening ankle with firm, gentle hands. Charmain set her teeth and did not even wince at the pain.

"H-m—a pretty bad sprain," he commented at last. "I'm afraid it will be several days before you can even stand on it. To-morrow morning I'll ride into the village and bring Doc Shulster out to have a look at it."

"But I—I can't stay here to-night!" Charmain exclaimed. The color flooded into her face as his cool blue eyes were raised candidly to hers.

"Why not? Most certainly you could not stay alone lying on the edge of the road. First we'll have tea—I have things almost ready. But I'll bandage that ankle for you before we begin."

Charmain watched his capable fingers tear the clean linen, wind it smoothly and tightly in place, tie it into an expert knot. Then he left her for a moment to bring a pot of strong, steaming tea, a plate of brown bread, pats of fresh butter, and a huge jar of homemade strawberry jam, which he spread before her on the little table.

"Not much," he laughed, "but perhaps we can make a feast of it."

Charmain thought that it would, indeed, taste like a feast. She had not realized how hungry she was. Well, she would eat.

"But I—I really cannot stay here all night," she said again. "Because—well—you see—there is no one else here, is there? No one but you, I mean."

"Not a soul." His blue eyes smiled. He poured her tea, drew another chair up for himself and sat down. Then the smile left his eyes. "It's not—I hope that you aren't afraid of me?"

"No." Charmain's eyes met his.

"Or of robbing me of my bed," he went on. "I have another room in my humble dwelling, if you please. You

shall be as safe and as cozy there as though you slept in a palace fit for a princess—like yourself."

Charmain blushed. He might be a rough looking farmer, wearing work-a-day clothes, but he knew how to make pretty speeches, and to talk like a gentleman.

"Of course, if you prefer, I'll sleep out in the barn—"

"Oh, no!" the girl interrupted. "I wouldn't have you do that." He had been so kind, she did not want to drive him out into the cold. She knew that she would be far safer here than she would have been had she not run away.

"Then that's that — since there is really no choice in the matter. To-morrow I'll get one of the women from town to come out and stay with you until that ankle mends. But this is to-night — you're not eating! This tea, you know, is champagne, and the bread is hors d'oeuvres and squab on toast and broccoli, while the jam is our *pâtisserie*. To the princess"—he raised his cup of tea with a gay flourish—"health and happiness—always."

CHARMAIN'S dark eyes sparkled, the color crept back into her pale cheeks. She gave him a gracious bow and murmured "thank you." She had never dined on squab on toast and hors d'oeuvres and champagne, but she could pretend that she had.

She wondered if this farmer, who spoke so glibly of such things, was given to dreams and pretending, too. She wondered a great many things about him. Most of all she wondered that he did not question her about herself.

"But you haven't asked," she said shyly, "how the princess happened to come to your castle — alone — in the middle of night."

"It is not for such as I to ask," he smiled at her. "One does not question a princess. One is honored—one waits—if the princess cares to speak."

"You would let me come—and go—without asking anything of me?" Charmain marveled, and found that because of that she wanted to confide in him.

"Unless the princess wished to tell me," he said again.

"Weren't you surprised—didn't you wonder, when you found me lying there on the road—how I got there—where I came from—why—"

"I was glad that it was I who found you," he answered simply.

"Well," Charmain drew a deep breath, "I was running away from—from something terrible. Something terrible I had seen." She closed her eyes for a brief second and a slight shudder shook her.

"Some man," her host said, and a dark flush spread over his face.

"Yes," Charmain answered. "First I ran away from myself—by running away with him. But soon I found I was running into something more dreadful—and so I wanted to run away *from* him. Then—the something terrible happened—and I *did* run away . . . Oh, but of course you don't understand. I wonder if I really told you about it if you could?"

"I think so," the man said gravely.

Charmain, looking into his eyes, knew that he would.

"I'm not a princess." She gave a little hard laugh. "I'm not much of anything at all. Just a girl who's lived a lonely hard life on a lonely hard farm. Until this man came along. He was everything that I was not. At least, so I thought. Educated, cultured, traveled—a man who had lived in cities, seen things, done things—*really*

lived. He offered to take me away from the farm. Oh, you can't know how I hated it!"

A wave of bitter feeling swept over her face.

"Hated everything about it. So I went with him—ran away. But soon, before we had gone very far, as I told you, I began to wonder if I wasn't running into something worse. I began to wonder who this man really was—where he really came from—what he really did—how he lived. I can't explain why, but I felt afraid."

"I know," the man opposite nodded, "and I know why. Sometime I'll tell you."

"I didn't know why," the girl went on, "but I did know that I was afraid of him. That I wanted to run away from him—even more than I had wanted to run away from the drudgery and monotony and emptiness of the farm. But I couldn't. I couldn't go back, after I'd run away. I don't know how I am going to go back now! We drove all day—away from the farm until night time. Then *that* happened—and I found the courage to run away from him, even though I could never go back, even though I didn't know where I was going."

She paused a moment, wondering if she could tell about that ghastly scene—and the revelation it had been to her that her fears of that man were well founded.

"Yes," the man who called her a princess said quietly—nothing more.

Charmain knew that she could tell him anything.

"WE pulled up in front of a little country store. The man wanted to ask our way—he went inside. I could see it all so plainly through the window, like a stage setting—darkness outside, the light thrown strongly on the man and the old man who was in the store. The old man got up from behind the counter and then walked around in front to speak with him. He was such an old man—bent—tired. He could not have hurt any one, I'm sure." There was a pitiful note in her voice.

"I watched—they exchanged a few words—even then I was wishing I had the courage to get quickly out of the car and run away. But when I thought of going back I found I hadn't. Then suddenly I saw the hand of the man I was with creep slowly back to his hip pocket! The old man said something else, and half turned—there was a flash of steel — a deadly report — and the old man crumpled backward against the counter. His face—it was terrible—such fear—such amazement in his eyes. He didn't scream out as I had thought—but fell back. I knew he was dead. I opened the door of the car, jumped out and ran—ran—I saw the lights of the car—somehow I *knew*—it was his car—that he meant to find me—he knew that I had seen what he had done. I sprang into a ditch—it was then I hurt my ankle."

"And I found you," the man interrupted, and the sound of his voice, warm, natural, strong, seemed to wash out the things that Charmain had just told him—make them fade into a nightmare that had passed. "I'm glad you told me. But now you mustn't think of it—any of it—again. Now it is time for the princess to sleep." He got to his feet, pushed back his chair, threw another log onto the fire and stood smiling down at her.

"You see I still think you're a princess," he said. "I understand why you ran away from the farm. I ran away once, too—from a farm—this

farm. But I came back. For you are wrong about that. A farm is a lovely thing, a beautiful thing, a good thing. It is hard and cruel at times, but there's enough beauty to make up for that. Why, I have lived in all the big cities of the world, and I have never seen anything so lovely as my apple orchard in the spring—or the shocks of corn outlined in the moonlight, or the sun rising away in the distance over the fields, back of the hill."

"I'm never, never going back!" Charmain cried passionately. She did hate it. Nothing he could say, even though he had a magical way of saying things, could change that.

"That is for the princess to decide," he said lightly. "She will have courage enough when that time comes. For she was right about that—about running away from the man."

"Yes, yes," Charmain said. "I'm glad of that. No matter what happens, I'll always be glad."

"Nothing so dreadful is going to happen," the man assured her. "If you will permit me, I shall carry you into your chamber of gold. I shall blow out your candles and close your door. Nothing shall happen to disturb the princess's slumber until the sun has risen over the fields and the hill."

"You talk like a poet," Charmain smiled, "and—"

"Look like a farmer," he finished, when she blushed and did not go on. "But you are wrong again. I am a courtier of your court. Allow me, princess!"

He stooped and picked her up in his arms as though she had been a feather and carried her across the room, through a door.

"Why!" Charmain exclaimed, "it *is* a golden room. It's beautiful!" He had laid her down on the bed against a profusion of soft deep cushions—cushions of gold and rose and pale green and lavender, matching the other soft glowing colors of the exquisite room.

A lovely room, as Charmain had said. A room furnished in exquisite luxury; thick velvet carpet of pale green covering the floor, walls of deep cream with many well-grouped pictures, deep cushioned chairs, a *chaise longue* with a throw-cover of gleaming purple and gold drawn close to the wide long windows draped in pale green and gold, little tables with many books and magazines and bowls and vases of fresh flowers, silver shining from the mirrored top of the dainty dressing table, a tiny fireplace and kindled in it a dancing, laughing, little fire.

"It is the princess's for as long as she may wish," the man replied, his blue eyes twinkling at Charmain's delight and surprise.

"Oh, I could live *forever* in such a room!" Charmain cried; then laughed to cover her confusion. "I mean I never saw such a lovely room in all my life. I never even dreamed in all my dreams that there could be a room so lovely."

"I am glad," her rescuer replied. "It was my mother's. She loved it, too. She had to spend the last years of her life in here. That was why, as I told you, I had to leave my big cities and come back to the farm. At first I was bitter. I thought I hated the farm, too. I fought against it—thought I could not make any beauty here. But you see, I have. Beauty is hidden everywhere—and happiness—if you will look for it. But I must not keep the princess awake any longer." He laughed. "May *les anges* watch over you and guard your sleep."

He closed the door softly after him and left her to rest.

WHEN Charmain woke the sun was shining in through the windows, making everything a bower of gold indeed. The girl found a jug of clear water, a mirror and powder and a comb for her hair within reach of her hand. By the time she had made herself ready a knock sounded on her door.

"Breakfast is served for her highness!"

Charmain laughed and called out gayly that her courtier might enter and carry her forth. She had not felt so gay, so light-hearted, so happy before in her life. She had never looked so lovely, as the "courtier's" eyes told her frankly at sight of her.

She had found a warm robe of softest lavender satin, trimmed in deep bands of lavender ostrich feathers, thrown across a chair. Charmain knew that it had been placed there for her use, so that she had not hesitated to use it. Wrapped in its luxuriant loveliness she felt that she really looked like a princess—as she certainly did.

Her host, too, had tried to dress up to his rôle. His mop of corn-colored hair was carefully plastered in place, the stubble of beard had been removed from his chin and instead of the rough work-a-day clothes he wore a brown tailored suit, and a white shirt, and even a tie! The farmer had vanished. Before her stood a gentleman of the world.

But the gentleman's arms were as strong as the farmer's. He carried her into the other room, put her down in the big chair and placed her breakfast on the little table before her.

It was bliss to relax in his arms

"I've had mine long ago," he smiled, when Charmain invited him to sit down with her. "A farmer rises with the sun, you know. Besides, I want to get started for the village so that I may get back as quickly as possible. I have

to walk, since my means of transportation—a trusty tin Lizzie—broke down last evening. That was why I was walking then, and found you. Bless the tin Lizzie! It will be fixed for me by now and I promise you I shall drive back as fast as my chariot will carry me."

"You needn't hurry so," Charmain said, "I shall get along perfectly well, I know."

"It's not that," his face was serious, "you must remember that no matter *what* happens, you must never be afraid again."

"Afraid!" Charmain laughed. Nothing could happen here to make her afraid!

"I'll have Dr. Shulster stop by today to look at your ankle, and I'll get Mrs. O'Rourke, who cleans up twice a week for me, to come stay while you are here. You will not find her as elegant a lady-in-waiting as your highness might desire. But you'll find her heart as big as her two hundred pound person."

"You are *so* good!" Charmain said softly. "I have been wondering how I am ever going to thank you."

"The princess's smile is thanks enough!" He bowed gallantly; then sobered again, saying once more before he left her:

"Remember, do not be afraid! I shall be back as soon as possible."

Charmain wondered again why she should be afraid. All fear had left her. She had never felt safer, or happier, than in this little house with its lovely golden room—and its strong, kind owner.

What could happen now?

After she finished her delicious breakfast of crisp bacon and newly-laid eggs and hot toast with a pot of chocolate, there were magazines and books near at hand with which to pass the time until his return.

THE time flew by so quickly that Charmain did not hear the door open, or footsteps in the room until feeling, rather than hearing, some new presence near her, she glanced up. She gave a little startled cry—her book clattered to the floor, she shrank back into the big chair.

The man gave an ugly sneering laugh. "A fine way to greet me," he said. "But perhaps I took you too much by surprise. However, I am almost as surprised myself. I've been looking for you most of the night, but I didn't expect to find you here. Were you here—all night?"

"Yes," the girl answered, her voice so low that it was scarcely audible. The color had left her cheeks; her heart was pounding furiously with fear.

"Alone?" the man asked sharply.

"No," Charmain said.

He took a quick step toward her, caught her wrist in a tight grasp. "Any one here now? Tell me!"

Charmain shook her head, tried to draw her hand away. "Please!" she looked at him imploringly, "my wrist —you're hurting me!"

"I didn't mean to hurt you," he laughed, letting go. "Unless you're lying to me. But I guess you're not. I made pretty certain no one was about before I came in. I went as far as the next town last night, looking for you. Then realized what a boob I was—you couldn't have walked that far—so I turned back. Well, come on—we haven't much time to lose."

"Come on?" Charmain asked. "But I—I'm not going—anywhere."

"Oh, yes, you are!" The man's face was very handsome in repose—dark,

flashing eyes, dark skin, arrogant, sensuous mouth—but when he laughed in his sneering way his face was not good to look upon. "You forget that you promised to marry me, my dear. You forget that you can hardly go back to that miserable little farm where you lived—*now*."

"But I'm not going to marry you," Charmain cried. She was no longer afraid; or, at least, she tried to tell herself that she was not—remembering the last words that her courtier had said—"Do not be afraid—I will be back soon."

"Oh, yes, you are!" the man laughed lightly. "You can't change your mind on me, Charmain. I suppose you think because of what happened—in that little store—"

CHARMAIN gave a low cry, and covered her face with her hands for a moment.

"Just as I thought!" the man exclaimed triumphantly. "I wasn't *sure* that you had seen— Now, my dear, you *are* going with me! Do you think I'm fool enough to leave you here—or anywhere—to squeal on me?"

"I wouldn't—squeal on you," Charmain cried quickly. "I promise you that—if you'll only go—please! Now!" A thought came to her: "You had better go quickly—the farmer—the man who lives here will be back."

"Oh, he will, eh?" His dark eyes flashed scornfully. "*He!* So you stayed here last night alone with a man! You've changed your mind about marrying me for more than one reason! You think—after last night—that you'd rather live with a farmer. Well, I think not! I'll overlook the little incident—take you along anyway—even if you don't care to *marry* me. You little devil—you *beautiful* little devil," he came close to her, leaned down as though he would gather her into his arms, crush her there. "I hadn't realized until now how beautiful you are."

"Step back a little, please," a quiet voice said from the doorway, "the lady may not care to know how beautiful you think she is."

The man stepped back quickly and turned.

"I heard every word you said," Charmain's courtier went on calmly, coming into the room. "First, you will apologize for insulting the lady!"

"Who do you think *you* are?" the dark man sneered defiantly.

"I think I am the owner of this farm and that you aren't welcome here—Dan White—or *Smoke* White, as many persons call you."

At mention of that name, Charmain saw the man, whom she knew as Whittier, make a slow stealthy movement with his right hand—a movement that she had seen him make when his back was turned toward her once before—seen through the window of a little country store—a flash of steel.

"No—no!" Charmain screamed. She threw herself with all her strength and force against his arm, just in time to send the revolver whirling across the floor!

Almost at the same instant the owner of the house sprang at the man whom he had called "Smoke." They fought desperately, each with all the strength and power he possessed.

In spite of the pain in her ankle, Charmain managed to drag herself up and on to the couch, where she sat dazed with fear and her inability to help. In her heart was a wild prayer that help would come. A prayer that was answered miraculously, suddenly, as though out of the sky.

The man called Smoke had managed a powerful blow just above the farmer's brow, so that the blood poured from the cut down his face, almost blinding him—but driving him to such fury that with one terrific wrench he flung his body on top—just as the door was thrown open and four men rushed into the room!

"So you beat us to it, eh, Bruce?" one of the men laughed, after the man called Smoke was securely bound and helpless on the floor.

"I might not," the farmer answered, "if you boys hadn't come when you did. The lady," his blue eyes sought Charmain's, "spoiled his chance to shoot me down in cold blood."

"Same as he shot that poor old feller at the crossroads," one of the other men said. "Well, Smoke, you've put it over a long time. With the whole country searchin' for you. But now us boys will take you for a little ride."

"BUT I don't understand!" Charmain cried when the door had closed. "Who is this man, and how did you know who he was? Did those four men really come in answer to my prayer?"

"Your prayer may have had something to do with it," her courtier smiled. "But I had told the men when I went to the village that maybe they would find their man here. I thought before very long he would come to find you.

"How did I know his name? Most every one knows his name—the notorious Smoke White, leader of a bunch of gangsters noted for bootlegging, blackmailing, crooked deals of all sorts. Lately the whole country has been searching for Smoke, since he added the murder of one of another gang to his black list."

"But how did you know him?" Charmain persisted.

"I told you I used to live in cities, in the midst of things. I'd heard of him, seen his pictures many times then. Since the search has been on for him, notices and descriptions and pictures have been posted in all the cities and towns, while he hid, I suppose, near the farm where you lived. I suppose, too, that that poor old man at the crossroads store recognized him, too, and spoke his name—"

"And was shot down—just as he tried to shoot you," Charmain cried in horror, "when *you* spoke his name."

"What if you hadn't run away—the second time," Bruce said gravely. "Even the old man's death, you see, was for some good. I have been waiting a long time—I and the golden room—for the coming of the princess, and now that you have come—won't you stay—always?"

"Always?" The color leaped into Charmain's cheeks, her dark eyes grew soft with wonder. Yet there was no questioning, no doubt in her voice when she answered: "Yes, if you want me, I will stay always."

He swept her up into his strong arms so that her eyes must meet his—and her lips. Then he laughed tenderly.

"You won't run away again?"

Charmain shook her head. Her heart was too full for words, but her eyes gave her promise.

"I'll tell you why," Bruce said solemnly. "I said I would tell you sometime why you were afraid when you ran away that first time—and why you were not afraid with me. Because, whether it be city or farm, there is no fear—no l o n e l i n e s s—no danger—where love lives."

The farmer kissed the lips of his princess.

Handwriting and Happiness

By JOHN FRASER

JOHN FRASER, gifted handwriting expert, who has made a name for himself both in his native England and here in America, will analyze your handwriting. If you wish to know whether your sweetheart is the right man for you to marry, inclose samples of your own and your sweetheart's handwritings and address your letter to Mr. Fraser, care "Service for Sweethearts." If you wish his help in finding the profession for which you are best fitted, address him care "Your Career." For general reading, care "Character Analysis."

You may take advantage of one or any service, but a coupon must accompany each request for handwriting analysis. Coupon will be found at the end of this department.

Mr. Fraser bases his judgments on the scientific rules of graphology. In no case does he forecast the future or attempt to reveal the past. Scientific graphology undertakes only to reveal the inner secrets of your nature.

As many answers will be given on these pages as space permits. All other questions will be answered by mail. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany your request for analysis.

IT is quite evident to me that the young men readers of ALL-STORY are gathering courage all the time.

A few months ago my mail consisted chiefly of letters from the feminine sex, all anxious to know what their handwriting showed in the way of a career, or about their chances of matrimonial felicity. To-day it is entirely different, for, true to form, when a young man's thoughts instinctively turn to love at this season of the year, my male readers are running a neck-to-neck race with their sisters. This is as it should be, since I see no reason why a young man should not be posted on all the eccentricities of his sweetheart, as well as her good qualities. Un-

fortunately the latter—her virtues—are always before him in these courting days, with the result that there is too often disappointment instead of happiness after the honeymoon is over. It is true none of us are perfect, but a little more knowledge of our life partners, as seen through the handwriting, is nothing to be sneezed at.

So, fellows, don't hesitate to write me about your sweethearts and I will advise you honestly.

SERVICE FOR SWEETHEARTS

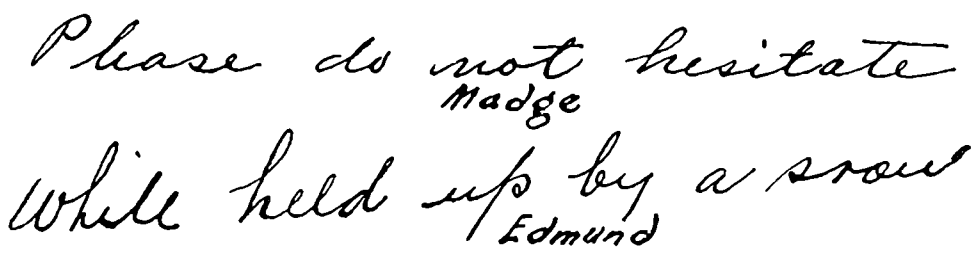
I will be interested in seeing
Lillian
I firmly believe that a person's
Harold

(Miss Lillian B., Montreal, Que.) You're the type of girl I like to hear from. My word, you've got some pep! A born optimist of the first water, I would call you. I just hope you are serious, Lillian, about that invitation to your June wedding. I lived in Montreal myself for several years, and know all about your trysting-places. The chances are I'll be in your neighborhood when your wedding bells ring, and who knows but that I may be the first to congratulate you after the parson pronounces Harold and you husband and wife? I hope so, so take the hint and send me an invitation. I find there is very little for me to say to you two young folk. Both samples of handwriting pleased me immensely. You two love-birds ought to be very happy. You are simply made for each other, and I say that in all seriousness. You both have aggressiveness, optimism, and health. Your parents before you have been clean-living people, with good heads on their shoulders. Your romantic tendencies, Lillian, measure up to Harold's beautiful perception of the Deity. That boy of yours is really poetic, and gravitates to the higher and better things of life. There will be no anxious nights for you wondering about Harold's whereabouts. He'll be right at your side all the time, else I've missed my guess about your lover. Get busy, little girl, with your hope chest. My best wishes go with you both! I know you'll find happiness.

of other men and decided
Edith
is my reason for settling down
Peter

(Miss Edith O., Cleveland, Ohio.) Though you are Peter's betrothed you evidently don't quite understand the man. Your natures don't blend natur-

ally. There will have to be lots of adjusting between you two before you can hope for happiness in your love nest, Edith. Peter is a man of the world. He has material instincts. He sees life very differently from your vision. Love and beauty, which you admire and crave for, don't count for much in your fiancé's life. Baseball and football games are more to his liking. Coney Island, with its noise and ballyhooing, gives him a greater thrill than the soft music of the waterfall or the murmur of the brook. He is materialistic, and you are spiritualistic. Do you get me? Before such a union could ever be a success there would have to be some plain talking. You have to conform to Peter's way of thinking, or he has to see eye to eye with you, otherwise there's going to be trouble before the honeymoon is over. I would call you two splendid individuals, with complementary qualities in both of your natures, but what of that when your tastes differ so much? You can't expect Providence to take a hand in the matter if you don't, first of all, do something yourself. To my way of thinking, it's a dangerous business for any girl with your refined tastes to get married to a man with Peter's propensities. I wish you both well, but I ha'e ma doots about the union.



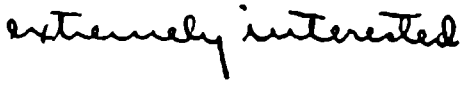
(Miss Madge F., Duryea, Penna.) You two young folk have all the chance in the world to be very happy and contented in each other's companionship. I admire your taste, Madge, in picking Edmund for your future husband. He is a clean-cut sort of chap, with a healthy outlook on life. A man who would be ever ready to "do his bit," and do it well. I'm sure you have discovered by this time that he is a very unselfish fellow, a man who is liberal at all times. Though his surname is essentially a Scotch one, I fail to see any of the characteristics of that race in his penmanship. On the contrary, he is inclined to be too magnanimous with his money, a weakness which you will have to combat when you're appointed Treasurer of the Household. To come to you, I like your whole nature, with the exception of two weak tendencies. The first is, you are a little too apt to procrastinate. You apparently dislike drudgery of any kind. Housework is not exactly your hobby, and consequently you consider it an unpleasant duty, something to be shirked. I would warn you against this putting-off habit, Madge; it may spoil a great deal for you when Edmund discovers that you are that sort of girl. Your temper has dynamite qualities in it. It is simply explosive, and never far from the surface. For goodness' sake keep the lid on it, if you value your peace and happiness. You must have been spoiled in your young days. Despite all this, however, you are a well-mated couple.

CHECK UP ON YOURSELF

IF YOUR CAPITALS HAVE INCURVES PRECEDING THE LETTER, LIKE THIS—

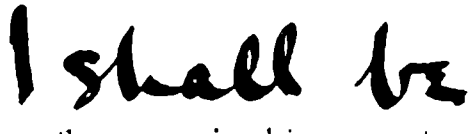
—it bespeaks egotism, and a touchiness regarding your social standing. Also that you have a mighty good opinion of yourself.

SHOULD YOU WRITE YOUR SMALL "M" OR "N" IN THE CONCAVE FORM LIKE A "U"—



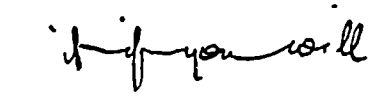
—it indicates that you are a very adaptable person. One who has a faculty for making friendships.

WHEN THE WRITING IS LARGE, THICK AND BLACK LIKE THIS—



—the person is always sure to resort to trickery. It shows an absence of real refinement.

IF YOU HAVE A HABIT OF JOINING YOUR WORDS TOGETHER AS THIS WRITER DOES—

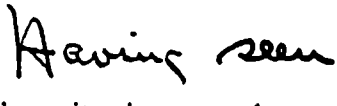


—you are sure to be stubborn and sometimes very willful. It also denotes fussiness over small things.

ANY ONE MAKING THE SMALL "D" WITH A GRACEFUL UPWARD CURVED STROKE LIKE THIS—

—is always sure to have a critical mind, with a nature which is rather introspective. It is also indicative of culture.

WHEN THE PENMANSHIP IS UPRIGHT OR VERTICAL LIKE THIS—



—the writer is sure to be a great reasoner, but will never enthuse over anything. He will not like to be hurried, and is sometimes very slow to move.

YOUR CAREER

I have read your

(Miss I. A. L., Birmingham, Penna.) It is quite evident that you are not a person who fusses and fumes over the small things of life. Like all such women, you have the courage of your convictions, and are very outspoken. You like always to be on the move. A woman full of energy, quick in perception and mentally alert, you are healthy both in body and in mind. A person with your natural ability automatically falls into the leader class. Since you have the vision and the confidence to guide and direct, you are specially adapted for some directorship in an institution where discipline and order are imperative. For a woman, you have lots of self-control and diplomacy. Your optimism and enthusiastic nature are very helpful to you in the making of friends, and your business ability is outstanding. I observe that your personality is distinctive. You have mannerisms that attract attention wherever you go. Of course, like the rest of us, you have your faults, some of which are rather pronounced. For example, you are a very insistent person. You must have your own way, otherwise there's sure to be trouble in the camp. Then again, though no one could truthfully call you tight-fisted, you are of an economical turn of mind, and consequently you like value for your money all the time. All these faults, however, are small compared to your excellent characteristics.

would there you is

(Miss Margaret S., Little Rock, Ark.) I gather from your penmanship that you are the kind of girl that likes to do things and handle affairs rather than think deeply about them. You are the practical woman rather than the student, and your greatest success will be found in work which calls for a display of business or technical acumen. Concentration is not one of your strong points. When necessary you can think through a problem, but as a general rule you don't like to do such thinking, your mind is more inclined to wander to a thousand irrelevant things. In spite of this, however, I find you rather skillful at anticipating the results of a contemplated action. All this leads me to say that you are "cut out" for some position which brings you face to face with men and things of the world. An outside selling job would be ideal for a person of your ability. You have the confidence and the pep which would enable you to convince the most hard-boiled prospect. In a business sense, you have what Elinor Glyn would call "It"; there exists a certain magnetism in your make-up which is refreshing. Unlike many of your sisters, you are not the least impulsive. On the contrary, you simply dread doing something on the spur of the moment which might lead to unforeseen circumstances. From first to last, business is your forte.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

you have some appe

(Miss Carrie K., Santa Monica, Cal.) You are unusually susceptible to sentiment, and your feelings play a great part in the conduct of your life. You evidently allow your impulses to guide the course of your action many times, and your decisions are frequently colored by purely subjective con-

siderations. It is not surprising, then, to discover that you are extremely generous, and that, when your sympathies are touched by a worthy cause, you can be liberal with your money and assistance. Physically, you have an abundant store of vitality and enthusiasm. You have an enviable buoyancy of spirit, and the very idea of failure is repugnant to you. I notice you are not especially methodical in your attack on work to be done, and that you have a positive distaste for any kind of work which savors of monotony. Glancing at your less desirable qualities, I discover a very pronounced streak of egotism and conceit running through your nature.

To sum up, you are a woman with a distinctive personality, which, however, is somewhat hampered by the presence of certain characteristics which are not quite praiseworthy.

specimen of his hand

(Miss Charlotte P., Chicago, Ill.) You impress me as an individual who is inclined to be temperamental, and with this goes a tendency to fret and worry about things. In your personal life you are quiet and modest, and like to let others take the curtain calls while you do the work unobtrusively back stage. This betokens a simple disposition, requiring little attention from the outside in order to be happy. You are unassuming, and never try to claim credit, even though it may be your just due. You also have patience and self-control, and do not let your feelings run away with you. From another angle, I notice one fault which your prudent and logical nature leads you into. That is tardy resolution, which may be taken at times for weakness or timidity. Caution is well in its place, but there are occasions when the man or woman of ready judgment gets things done in time, while the more prudent person is trying to make a decision. You are a sensitive sort of girl, and, I am afraid, cannot discriminate very well between slights that are meant and those that are not.

It would pay you not to be so thin-skinned in future.

JOHN FRASER,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway,
New York City.

This coupon is not good after March 8. A stamped addressed envelope must be enclosed when forwarding.

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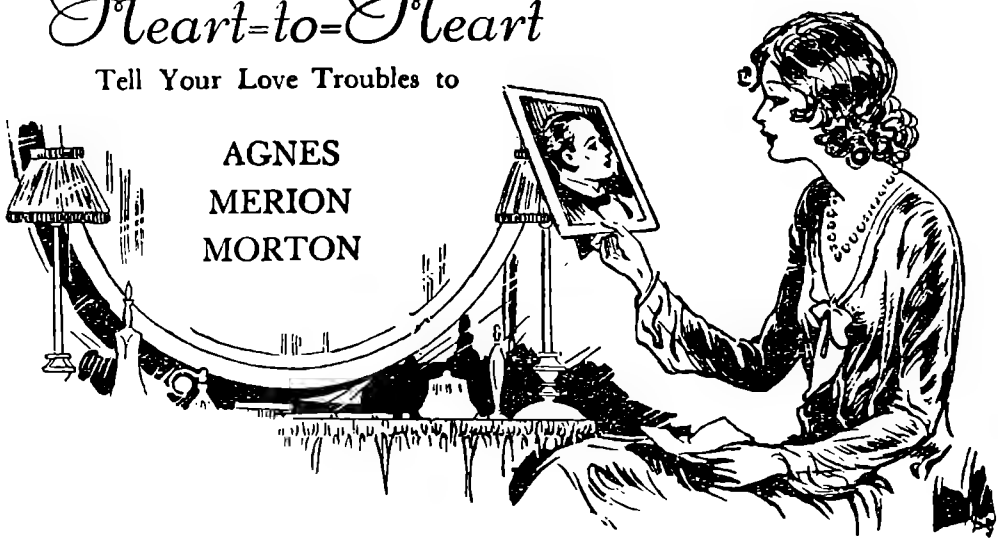


MRS. MORTON wants you to feel that she is a friend—some one to whom it is a comfort to tell your problems, who will advise and encourage you in your struggle for happiness, and who is always here to help. She is interested in you. Write to her freely, addressing your letter care All-Story Magazine, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

Every letter is confidential.

As Mrs. Morton receives so many letters, she cannot publish answers to all in the space allotted to her. Some, therefore, are answered by mail. Be sure to enclose a stamped, addressed envelope with your question.

THE first letter this week may not seem very important to our older readers, but it asks a question which is so very often asked by the younger ones that I think it only fair to give it a place.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am not a popular girl at school, but I don't mind that. I am seventeen, and a sophomore in high, and I have been in love ever since I was in grammar grades with a boy who is a senior now. He is so good-looking and so popular. He plays on all the teams, and goes with the very nicest and richest girls, and he has never said a word to me except "Hello"! I love him so much I think about it all the time, and I know he would like me if he only knew me. How can I get him, Mrs. Morton? It would be such a feather in my cap to have him like me, and such a lesson to the girls who have snubbed me and laughed at me for never having a boy friend. Please map out some plan for me, something to do and say to make him interested. I know you can. Of course, people say he has a swelled head because he is run after so much, but I feel that I understand him better than any of the others do or ever could. I just worship him, Mrs. Morton. You don't know how I feel when I even meet him on the street. And I don't care anything about any one else. He is the only friend I want, and I'd be perfectly happy if I could have him not to have any one else. Please help me, as you have helped so many.

UNHAPPY MILICENT.

Milicent, I do try to help all my girls, but what I try to help you to do is to be sensible and strong and wise. I do not pretend to have a love charm or potion which might make this boy care for you, and I think you would be a good deal better off not to waste so much of your precious youth day-dreaming about him. Instead, why not try to see the good in other people,

those who are closer to you? Why pick out the town sheik, anyway? There are probably a dozen boys in your own class not so athletic perhaps, nor so richly endowed with good looks, but every bit as worth while, and very likely more so. If this boy has a "swelled head" he would doubtless think that whatever you did was done with the idea of attracting him. You would have to force yourself upon him and your methods could hardly fail to be obvious. I advise you, rather, to single out the shyer, less popular ones. Make conversation with them when the opportunity arises; get them to tell you what they plan to do when they are graduated, what they think of different little happenings in the school and the town. Talk about the latest flying stunt—where are the flyers to-night? Ask them if they've ever been up in an airplane themselves. Get them started on their hobbies—almost every boy has one. And the "odd" ones, the bashful ones, will be grateful for your interest. They will appreciate it far more than this boy who is run after would, and I shouldn't wonder if you discovered that they are just as likable as he is. But don't concentrate on boys, and don't say you don't care whether other people like you or not. Make a friend wherever you have the opportunity—among older men and women, among children. Friends never come amiss, and anyway, boys will like you better if you are nice to every one than if you just don't care.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I have a very difficult problem to solve and would like your advice on it. I am eighteen. Two years ago I started to go to a new school and one of the boys who was taking a P. G. course there fell for me. I was told not to pay any attention to him because he was fickle by nature and always gave a newcomer a welcome. Well, it was not hard for me because my mother did not let me go out with boys then. She said I was too young and should study my lessons and not worry my head about such things. She would not even let me talk to him on the phone. He called every night for awhile, and I never spoke to him unless I got to the phone first. If mother answered she always said I was studying and she would not disturb me, or something like that. She really helped me with him, although that wasn't why she did it. It made him crazy to get me to go with him, and I am not conceited enough to think I could have held him as long as this if I had been allowed to go out with him from the beginning.

Well, last year he got a job, but did not work at it very long. His people have some money, but are not rich. Mother let me go to dances after school, entertainments, etc., that year, and he used to come to them and always danced with me and sometimes took me home. Once or twice I went to a show with him, too, but it always caused a fight at home so it was hardly worth it. Then he asked me to be engaged to him, and I said I would, but it would have to be secret, and he talked about marriage, but said it would have to be two or three years yet, until I was older and he was secure. He got two more jobs, but things didn't suit him—he hates to have anybody say "do this" to him—and he quit them both after two or three months.

My parents hate him. They say he's no good, and that we'd never be happy together. They don't want me to marry until I'm twenty-five. Imagine! He does nothing now. Says he is discouraged, that he has nothing to work for, that my people have sapped his ambition and spoiled his life. I know I could make something of him if they would only give me a chance. I love him, and can never forget him.

Why must they protest so, and break us up? We have been separated for three months now, but he still calls me once or twice a week and, of course, I occasionally see him on the street. But I promised mother I would not meet him on the sly, and I don't like to break that promise. She is good to me in every way but this. I want you to tell me if I should be true to him or true to my folks, but particularly I want to ask you what to do when I meet him at the Easter dance. I know he will be there because it is a big event in this town, and I have already accepted an invitation to go. MOLLY O'B.

Since I do not know your friend it would not be fair for me to judge him, but I do know this, Molly: usually fathers and mothers can size up their daughters' friends better than the girls themselves can. You see, your parents have had experience in the world, and know a man—or the opposite—when they meet him.

You cannot say you will "never forget" because you are so very young, and deep and real as first love seems you will probably be in love and out again half a dozen times before you marry. I hope you will, because the more you have known, the better judge you will be when it finally comes to settling down. I am not unsympathetic. I know just what you are going through. But I also know that most girls look back in later years and realize that they first loved a person who was not worthy. And the reason for that is, you do not really love this one boy. You merely love your own ideal of him.

When you meet him at the dance, and he talks to you in the same way, tell him to try to brace up and show your people that he *is* worthy after all. He must stand on his own two feet, get a job and make good in it, save his money and get a substantial sum in the bank—if he will do this, he will prove to them that he is a man. Many a woman, Molly, has married a fellow to "reform" him, and lived to rue the day. If he will not reform *for the sake of his own self-respect* you could never trust him. If he won't be a man in order to win you, he would never take the trouble to change his ways after you're won!

Say that you will be true to him for two years, since you honestly believe you can be—maybe you can—and that during that time he must make good. You can tell by his attitude whether he is worthy of your continued interest. If he still talks in that weak and selfish way, blaming you and your parents for his own failures, it ought to open your eyes to the fact of his worthlessness. And however hard it may seem now to separate from him, your level head must tell you that it would be infinitely harder to be married to him and have him fail you at every turn of the road.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I will come right to the point. Several years ago I got a "pen pal" through another magazine, a fellow who worked in Boston and seemed like an awfully nice fellow. He used to talk to me, after awhile, about his little sister up in the country (Vermont), and then he began sending me pictures taken up on the farm and she was in some of them—a pretty kid, just growing up. One Christmas when he was home I got a card from her—"From Larry's sister to Larry's friend"—and I wrote her a letter and said I'd like to correspond if she was willing. Ever since then—it is more than three years now—we've been writing regularly, and last summer it was only by an accident that I didn't go up there to meet her. The boss canceled our vacations the last minute, and I'd have lost my job if I'd gone.

We were both disappointed, for I may say we've grown very fond of each other. Of course, you can't be sure just from letters, but she sounds so sweet and jolly and congenial. She does write a funny letter—no offense meant—and I like to get them.

Well, we're going to get our vacations early this year, since we're so busy in the summer, and I'd been planning again to go up to Vermont. They have invited me to stay with them even if old Larry isn't home. But my father's aunt, who keeps house for us—mother is dead—and my sister-in-law have both been talking to me and tell me that a girl who would write to a fellow she doesn't know can't be much good, and that no matter how nice she seems in letters she can't be really nice. They have almost made me decide not to go. Mrs. Morton, what do you think?

"LARRY'S FRIEND."

I think, boy, that your father's aunt and your sister-in-law belong to the Ancient and Immemorial Order of the World's Trouble Makers. There are, sad to say, a number of people walking this earth who have missed happiness themselves and begrudge it to anybody else. They bismirch everything that makes joy for others; they seem to take delight in "breathing poison on stained glass." Try to pay no attention to them. Do not let them spoil this beautiful, romantic friendship that has come into your life. It is too bad they know the history of the affair at all. Since you knew this girl's brother, even if only through letters, it was the

same as if he had introduced her to you. And if you were not truly congenial, and did not have a great deal in common, you would never have writen each other for three years. Take just as long a vacation as you can, Larry's Friend, and spend it all with Larry's sister. And here's hoping that neither of you will be disappointed!

Some time ago an individual, who signed himself R. Owens, wrote me a letter which he "dared" me to print. Since I have seen the answers to that letter, I have begun to feel that he was the daring one—that is, if he minds at all what people say about him.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I didn't expect to write a letter, but I always read your column and I couldn't resist writing one after reading Mr. R. Owens's letter. What kind of a man is he, anyway? Why shouldn't our mothers and wives have machines and the so-called labor-savers, if they can afford them? We are nine children, seven at home, and all working except two. When we were small mother had a hard time and couldn't have any machines and things, but, believe me, if there is anything to save her hard work now she has it, and why should anybody grudge her these things? I don't believe Mr. Owens has ever known real love or he wouldn't talk that way, because when you love some one you always want to try to make things easier for them, and not just treat them like a piece of useless material, to be used and treated just any way you please.

It is a good thing that you have decided to remain single, as I pity the poor girl who did marry you, if ever. My parents are both of German descent and have instilled in our minds and raised us to be honest, work hard, and always live a clean life, save something for a rainy day, and it is sometimes hard for me to understand the attitude of other people toward life. I work in an office where I come in contact with the public, and a lot of men, both married and single, and Mr. Owens's ideas are about the biggest joke I have ever heard of. I feel like he ought to fall in love and get a girl who will say, "I'm boss!" and treat him just exactly the way he expects to treat her.

JUST TWENTY-ONE.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

So Mr. Owens does not like it because your correspondents are after Mr. Higgins with hammer and tongs, as he puts it. Too bad! Mr. Owens, did you ever stop to think that if your mother had had some of these new-fangled labor-saving machines, and fewer children, she might have been alive to-day? You honor her, but what good is that doing her now? I sure would like to meet you and Al Higgins. When I got through you would surely love the fair sex—and how!

So we were created for the use of men? Say, I did not know they made them so dumb any more. Where the heck did you come from? I wonder, Mr. Owens, if you are not either very young or have one foot in the grave. I sure would like to know. Why don't you marry one of your foreign women? I have not seen one of them yet that do as their lord and master bids. Bunk!

Well, I don't think Mrs. Morton will print this, and I don't blame her. Oh, well, Mr. Owens, the worst I can wish you is to meet me.

A FLAPPER AND PROUD OF IT.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

This letter is in answer to the one written by R. Owens. Although I do not have the *pleasure* of knowing Mr. Owens, nevertheless that is not necessary for me to read his character, and I must say it doesn't show up in the least to his credit. I can readily understand why he will never marry. For one thing, there isn't an American girl to-day who has any intelligence at all who would even trouble to notice him. I know I wouldn't.

I never intend to marry either, but it is entirely because there are too many men like him. Although I am only in my early twenties, I know a lot about men, and I couldn't mention one thing that could be considered flattery. Thank Heaven, a girl to-day can be independent and doesn't have to be a slave to any man. Furthermore, ninety per cent of the girls to-day who marry have to keep themselves afterward, and sometimes they even have to keep their husband. I will say that's more than I would do. No man is worth it.

I really think the place for Mr. Owens is Turkey, where men can have women for amusement alone. But even Turks have more honor than he has, due to the fact that they have been raised in that manner, and he is supposed to be a civilized American, although his ideas don't evince any more sense than a cannibal's.

Perhaps *my friend* did have a wonderful mother, but she certainly had no backbone or she wouldn't have let a man walk over her as I take it her husband did. There is no such thing as love without some independence. In fact, I don't think in this modern day it is possible to find true love; it is merely animal passion and comes only from such men as he. You wouldn't find it in a high type of human being.

I sincerely hope that Mr. Owens has the privilege of reading this letter.

A MODERN GIRL.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I have read R. Owens's letter in regard to modern women. I am going after him "with

hammer and tongs"! Where does he get those slave ideas about women? Woman is just as valuable on this earth as man. Marriage should be on a fifty-fifty basis all the time. Maybe a woman's highest mission on earth is to bear children if she can, but "God" did not intend her to be a slave to man.

R. Owens says he envies his foreign neighbors who tell their wives what to do and they do it. Why do they? Because they fear, not love, their mates. I know what I am talking about. My parents are Polish. My dad a tyrant. Mother an invalid from ill-treatment and hard work. R. Owens says he honors his dear dead mother, who bore eleven kiddies and died before they were grown up. Perhaps if she'd had some of these "modern fangles" she would be alive to-day. I suppose it is all right for a man to leave his family at home evening after evening while he goes down town to a pool hall or bootlegger's house. The wife should grin and bear it. No, Mr. Owens, it is not being done to-day.

I have been married six years. We have our little quarrels, but make up. It is pretty hard to make ends meet on twenty-five a week, but we are pegging away. Some day we shall be over the top and sitting on top of the world, my hubby says. A woman's life is ten times harder than a man's if she has a family. She has to skimp to keep her family clothed and fed.

Wake up, Al Higgins, R. Owens, and the rest of you cave men! This is a fifty-fifty age. God bless the modern woman, who stands up for her rights. This is the good old U. S. A., not Europe, where tyrants reign. A free country!

UNCLE SAM'S DAUGHTER.

Please Write to Us!

Every day when the mail-man comes around, we look eagerly for personal correspondence from our readers. The happiest moments of our busy day are those in which we receive letters from friends we have never seen—girls who write what they really think of ALL-STORY magazine.

If you're too busy to write a letter, just fill out this coupon and mail it. *Thank you!*

THE EDITORS,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

Here is my opinion of the stories in this issue:

Lured by a Dream.....

Jungle Sweetheart .....

A Spectre from the Past.....

She Lied for Love.....

The Phantom Lover.....

Love's Branding Iron.....

Her Prince .....

Apart .....

Where Love Lives.....

My favorite authors are .....

Name .....

Address .....

(Name and address may be omitted, if desired)

Beauty For You

By FERNE CHANDLER

BEAUTY results from attention to the little things. Follow faithfully the beauty hints given in this department and you will be delighted with the results.

If there is any question about your personal appearance that you would like to ask Miss Chandler, address her care ALL-STORY, *280 Broadway, New York City.*

Be sure to enclose a stamped, addressed envelope with each question.

THE importance of "meals" is not restricted to diet alone in beauty. One of the most useful is almond meal.

Almond meal, oatmeal, bran, yellow corn meal—all have been on grandma's "personality" shelf. She used oatmeal bags in her bath, bran she took internally for complexion clearing, and yellow corn meal was a pet dry shampoo.

As in many other ways, this generation has improved tremendously in its beauty culture. However, I must grant our elders that we still use a great many of their ingredients.

The bathtub these days doesn't have a bag of oatmeal floating around it like a rubber duck; those of us who want the water softened use a sack of gauze with about a tablespoon of almond meal tied in it, with a dash of our pet bath salts lending the fragrance that gives the tub its luxury.

We don't always need such drastic methods as the morning dose of bran; we know how to keep our systems well ordered, and our faces free from pimples. But if we do get clogged pores in defiance of all we know about constant skin cleansing we get a bar of pure castile soap, shave it into tiny bits (the medium size part of a nutmeg grater is good for this purpose), mix into this thoroughly two parts almond meal (the exact amount to be judged by the size of the cake of soap used), and put it in jars to be kept handy.

Then, as a once or twice a week pore cleansing treatment, we steam our face—either by hot towels or the less drastic and better method of filling a bowl of steaming hot water, making a canopy for the head with a towel, bending over the steaming hot water, holding the towel so no steam escapes but gets to the facial tissues and opens the pores.

Then we put a quantity of the meal and soap mixture in the palm of our hand, add enough water to make a fairly soft paste, working it with the finger tips until it becomes a creamy lathery paste. Apply this over every portion of the face and particularly in the crevice of the nostrils, where the pores are apt to be the most clogged.

Allow this to dry until it feels tight, remove by several rinsings of clear tepid, or warm, water. Follow this with several rinsings of cool water and finally rub the entire face with ice or iced water. Use your favorite lotion after this, or if you have a dry skin use cream and allow it to remain on a few minutes. Do not use this treatment just before going on a "party" as it is apt to redden the skin, and do not rub or massage the paste into the skin as it may irritate. Another suggestion—whenever I give you any treatment for the face, be sure to understand that I mean it for the entire neck—back and front—also. It is so terrible to see a girl with a lovely white face and a muddy-looking neck!

As a skin bleach we again have almond meal—and again it is a paste. Take the white of an egg, add to this enough almond meal to make a thick paste, dilute this paste with enough pure rose water to lend fragrance and cause the paste to be creamy and usable. Mix all this thoroughly.

The method to use it: cleanse the skin, removing all traces of soap. Dry the skin carefully. If you cleanse with cream remove all traces of cream with a warm wet cloth. Have two pieces of gauze, cut slits in them to make a mask (I've told you how to do this before), spread a liberal amount of the paste on one mask and cover the paste with the other mask. Now you have an almond meal gauze sandwich. Put it over the entire face and neck, pressing it into the crevices carefully.

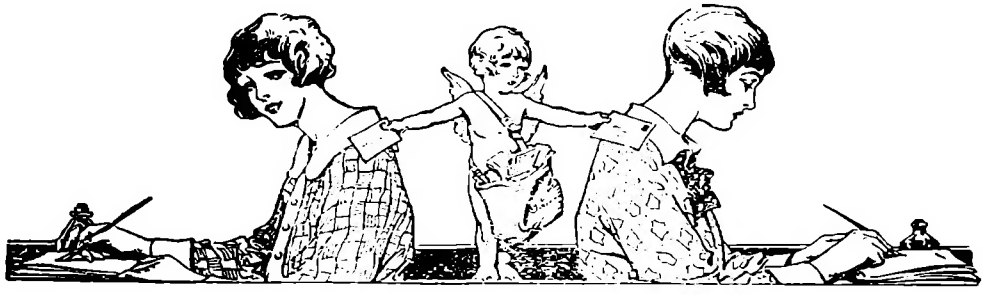
Now cover this with a hot wet towel. Then take a magazine and read. When you feel the towel cooling replace it with another hot one, and keep doing this until this game of changing towels gets to be a bore—which is generally in fifteen or twenty minutes. This is necessary to cause the almond meal to act properly, nourishing your skin and bleaching it. Those tiny wrinkles left over from the drying summer sun will be eradicated this way, too.

When you remove the mask rinse the skin with clear warm water until all the substance from the paste has been removed. A cool water rinse and finally the ice rub, and do keep rubbing the ice (gently, though), over the skin until you feel it glow. The result of two of these treatments a week will please you, I'm sure.

A frequent cry I hear, particularly this time of year, is *freckles.* Summer freckles are to be expected as some skins do not tan, but insist on burning and leaving as a memento of summer a batch of freckles. These are usually easy to get rid of, if you do not allow them to go on for years and keep adding new batches to them every summer.

Again almond meal paste! This time take about three tablespoons of peroxide, add six drops of ammonia (either household or the ten per cent pure that you get at a chemist's), and add enough almond meal to make a creamy paste.

Spread this over the freckles, allow it to dry, then rinse carefully with clear tepid water. Don't expect miracles—it will take several such treatments to show any reduction in the number of freckles, but persistence will get results.



The Lonesome Club

Conducted by DOROTHEA DALE

MAKE friends! Join the Lonesome Club and soon you will be getting more letters than any one you know.

Here's how to do it: if you wish your letter published in these pages write to Mrs. Dale, care of ALL-STORY, *280 Broadway, New York City, and describe yourself. Try to make it as interesting as possible—tell little things about yourself that will make others want to write to you.*

If you wish to communicate with the pals whose letters appear here, inclose your letter in a plain, stamped envelope and send it to Mrs. Dale. No letters will be forwarded without the extra stamp.

If you are a girl, you may write to other girls; if a man, to other men.

Please do not ask for the address of any one.

She Has Fun to Share

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I'm a girl just sixteen and would like to make just loads of friends by mail. I have dark hair, blue eyes and am five feet four inches tall. Am a modern girl and enjoy all kinds of sports.

I want, more than anything, to make new friends. I've a lot of them, but want more. So hurry, all you nice girls, and write to me. I'm not lonesome, but wanna share my fun, so don't forget me.

LUELLA OF ILLINOIS.

A Wireless from Canada

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I crave for pen pals and I know you will help me. I am a Canadian girl of nineteen, with brown hair and brown eyes, am five feet seven (with shoes on), and as for looks—oh, gosh, I hope that doesn't matter!

I am a druggist's assistant and though kept very busy, I always find time to write. Right now I have over thirty pen pals and I answer them all promptly, too. Love dancing, reading, and last, but not least, I am an ardent movie fan. Please, dear readers, write to me. I would love to hear from girls from Detroit, as I expect to go there next summer for a few weeks, though all letters are welcome, and all will be answered.

VIC.

Step Lively!

DEAR MRS. DALE:

We're two sisters who want plenty of pen pals. We would especially like to write to a couple of pals or a pair of sisters and their pals. I, Jean, am a girl of fifteen summers, brown-haired and green-eyed. Billie, is a girl of sixteen years, black-haired and blue-eyed. We are both fairly good-looking!

BILLIE AND JEAN.

A Girl of the Golden West

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I'd love to make some new friends, so am sending in my plea for pals. Here it is:

Well, for goodness' sake! I've been looking for *you* all over. It seems I was born sixteen summers ago, being endowed by nature with blue from the skies for my eyes, hair from her gold mines, five feet five and three-quarter inches in height, and flesh enough for two. But on the whole I'm happy enough when I'm playing the piano or enjoying some kind of sport. I was in hopes *you* would

write to me. Well, toodle-oo, and if you decide to make this chile happy she'll guarantee to give you

SUNNY SMILES OF CALIFORNIA.

He's a Champion

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I am looking for some true friends who are single and from eighteen to twenty-three years of age. I am five feet eleven tall and weigh one hundred and sixty-four pounds, and like all sports. I am a champion in tennis and also am a good swimmer. I promise to answer all letters sent me.

KEN.

Small Town Girl

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I live in a small town, have friends, too, but like to receive letters. I am seventeen and have blue eyes and light hair. Will answer all letters I receive.

MARJORIE.

Are You a Movie Fan?

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I get very lonesome at times and would like some pen pals. I am an Italian girl with brown hair, gray eyes and light complexion, and am considered pretty. I would like to hear from girls only, and especially from those who are fond of moving picture shows. My favorite sports are ice skating and golf.

CARMELLA.

Shy But—!

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I imagine this will develop into a pretty stiff sort of letter, for I simply can't get away from stilted office English. Anyway, the point is that I'd like awfully well to receive letters from your readers. Since the conventional thing seems to be to give a physical description of one's self, here goes for mine: Five feet three and a half inches, weight one hundred and thirteen, complexion clear, eyes green, hair light brown. Am a pretty keen student of psychology and of a rather cynical turn of mind, although I assure you this letter is written in all sincerity and with no sneer marring the countenance. My age—twenty-one. I hope this letter will secure correspondents for me.

BETTY L.

Paging Cleveland and Detroit

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I will come right to the point. We are three girls, twenty, twenty-one and twenty-two. We are making plans to go to either Cleveland or Detroit. We have relatives in both these cities, but we want to be on our own and not depend on them. We would, therefore, like to hear from people in both of these cities so that we could ask them the many questions we would like to ask. We hope that you will print this and forward any letters that you may receive to us.

We are Hungarians and associate with Germans, Americans, Hungarians, and have friends of other nationalities. We like dancing and enjoy the society of other people. We believe in enjoying life, but we also believe in working and helping other people enjoy life. We aren't flappers, but we enjoy good times, and we each own a wonderful sense of humor of our own.

We expect to have a home of our own. Naturally there are a great many questions we have to ask. We intend to join a church, and we'd like to know things about the people. I can't ask questions here because I don't want to take up an awful lot of room. We are making our plans, so hope that we will be able to get some advice soon.

YOLANDA AND HER PALS.

Just Another Lonely Girl

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I read ALL-STORY every time it comes out and I do so enjoy it. I wonder if you could find some lonely reader like myself who would like to write to me. I would like some one about nineteen or twenty years old, some one who is jolly, good-natured and lovable. I am a girl of eighteen, with brown curly hair, jade-colored eyes, and a few freckles. I am of medium height, rather slender, and average good-looking. I will be patiently waiting for some letter, and oh, I hope there will be a great many, for you see I'm only eighteen and so lonely.

ALYCE OF MINNESOTA.

Any Answers?

DEAR MRS. DALE:

Won't you please help out a lonely person from Ohio? I never see letters of this sort from Ohio, but this Ohio girl is certainly lonesome for pen pals. I am five feet three, have brown eyes and weigh about one hundred and twenty-five. I am a senior in high school, so you can easily guess my age. Won't some one from everywhere answer my letter?

LONELY BELLE.

Want Her Picture?

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I just read in ALL-STORY about lonely readers making friends through the mail. Now, I am very lonely and would love to have some pen pals. I am sixteen years of age. I have brown curly hair, which I am letting grow, and hazel eyes. I am about five feet five inches tall. I would like to hear from Jewish pals all over the world. They must be between the ages of sixteen and twenty-three. I am willing to exchange snaps with everybody. I love to read books, read and write letters. My hobby is hiking. So come on, pals, write to a lonely girl who is

LOVABLE AND SWEET.

ALL-STORY'S HALL OF FAME

Mary Strother Chambers

MARY STROTHER CHAMBERS, who has already brought so much delight to ALL-STORY readers with her charming story "Crisis," and that fascinating tale of love, "Just a Little Clown," is herself the heroine of a romance that began eight years ago when she married Whitman Chambers, who is also an author of distinction.

Just like any other normal girl, Mary's dreams soared no higher than the eternal age-old desire of all girls to be an understanding companion and loyal wife to the man of her choice. And so, never suspecting for a moment that she, too, could write, Mary Strother, terribly proud of her husband's talents, was quite content just to help him with his work by criticizing and typing all his manuscripts before he sent them off to the magazines.

It also meant traveling with him to all the odd and forsaken corners of the two Americas to gather material and local color for Whitman Chambers's stories. Magical months in the San Blas Islands, more months on the exotic coast of Mexico, long weeks in the fascinating interior of Panama, and then going home to a cozy cottage just a stone's throw from the lovely white beach of the Pacific Ocean, with the roar of the ocean in one's ears and the tang of the salt in one's nostrils—oh, it was all wonderful, of course, just like the dreams of some girl in her own stories, to be doing all these things with the man she had married.

But after the gods had thus given

Mary Strother all that a girl can desire in the way of love and romance, they felt perhaps that she was particularly fitted to help other girls find true romance and real love. At any rate, one day about two years ago, it suddenly occurred to Mary Strother that maybe she could write some stories of her own.

She and Mr. Chambers still spend a great deal of time in some of the most interesting spots of this continent. In fact they divide the year between traveling and pounding away at their typewriters in their cottage by the sea.

Beulah Poynter will tell you the story of her life in the next issue.